DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 180 579 PS 010 628

AUTHOR Jones, Elizabeth: Prescott, Elizabeth
TITLE Dimensions of Teaching -- Learning Environments. II. Focus on Day Care.
INSTITUTION Pacific Oaks Coll., Pasadena, Calif.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 49p.: For resume to Part I, see ED 120 268
AVAILABLE FROM Pacific Oaks College, 5 Westmoreland Place, Pasadena, CA 91103 ($3.00)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment): Child Responsibility: *Class Management: Classroom Arrangement: Classroom Materials: Complexity Level: *Day Care Programs: Early Childhood Education: *Educational Environment: Educational Equipment: Learning Activities: Play: *Preschool Learning: *Preschool Programs: Teacher Responsibility

ABSTRACT

The experiences of one non-profit day care center are used as illustrative material in this discussion of preschool teaching-learning environments. Chapter 1 introduces the volume with a brief argument stressing the importance of play in the preschool. Chapter 2 describes the problems at a non-profit day care center and presents staff dialogue from some of the initial problem solving sessions after the arrival of a new director. Chapters 3 through 7 discuss specific dimensions of the preschool teaching-learning environment including: (1) responsiveness of the environment, especially on a sensuous/tactile level; (2) degree to which children as opposed to teachers make choices; (3) level of complexity in equipment, materials, and activities; (4) balance of seclusion and intrusion; and (5) proportion of large muscle, high mobility to small muscle, sedentary activities. Chapters 8 and 9 look at thrivers and non-thrivers among preschool children and teachers. (JMB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED180579

300

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

DIMENSIONS OF TEACHING -- LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

II. FOCUS ON DAY CARE

by

Elizabeth Jones

and

Elizabeth Prescott

Photographic Credits

Bunny Rabiroff

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Elizabeth Jones

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 010628

Pacific Oaks College
5 Westmoreland Place
Pasadena, CA 91103

First Printing

© Pacific Oaks 1978

PREFACE

The analytic scheme presented in *Dimensions of Teaching Learning Environments* (Jones, Pacific Oaks, 1973) is applicable to many kinds of educational settings. In that book, however, most of our classroom examples were from elementary schools. One reader asked if we couldn't add some examples which would be more directly applicable to preschool settings. And so, in this second volume, we have.

We have chosen to focus on the experiences of staff in a non-profit day care center. Increasingly, preschool programs offer full day care. Many use makeshift, shared space--as does Ruby's center, which we describe in this book.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	PREFACE	i
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
1	INTRODUCTION: PRESCHOOL AS A PLACE TO PLAY	1
2	THE CIVILIZING OF RUBY'S CENTER: HOW IT BEGAN	2
3	DIMENSION: SOFTNESS/HARDNESS	12
4	DIMENSION: OPEN/CLOSED	15
5	DIMENSION: SIMPLE/COMPLEX	18
6	DIMENSION: INTRUSION/SECLUSION	21
7	DIMENSION: HIGH MOBILITY/LOW MOBILITY	26
8	THRIVERS AND NON-THRIVERS: CHILDREN	34
9	THRIVERS AND NON-THRIVERS: TEACHERS	38
	REFERENCES	44

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: PRESCHOOL AS A PLACE TO PLAY

Through play, children (and bigger people, too) learn a great deal about the variety and complexity of the world, and about themselves as self-directed learners. However, many schools from kindergarten onward make a point of being a work place, a place for serious learning where the child's play interests are not supposed to intrude. Especially in their more exasperated moments, teachers often make this point very clear. As one kindergarten teacher said firmly to me last year, "The children must learn that kindergarten is *not* nursery school." It is, rather, preparation for the world of not doing what you want to do.

In contrast, in planning programs for children under five, we are much more likely to provide for play experiences as a legitimate and essential way of learning. Although many preschool programs include teacher-directed group lessons, elementary-school style (and some teachers feel these are the only times when they are really teaching), nearly all programs also offer extended periods of active play, outdoors and/or indoors, in response to the active learning style of young children. Free-choice learning centers, comparatively rare in elementary classrooms, are commonplace in preschool; block corners, housekeeping areas, and art activities are the daily rule, rather than the exception.

It is in a play environment that children are able to sequence their own learning and move at their own pace. Play environments are much more likely than work environments to permit the exploration of materials other than paper and pencils. Children playing have access to the concrete world in all its diversity, and to other people with whom they can test both their ideas and their social skills. According to Jean Piaget's theory of development, this individualization, exploration, and direct access is essential to the cognitive development of young children--not only in preschool, but well beyond.

A good play environment is characterized by softness--sensory responsiveness--and by richness. To work well, it has to offer children plenty of interesting choices, clearly organized and accessible. When there isn't enough to do per child, or when what there is is poorly organized and hard for children to make choices among, a play environment is likely to be chaotic. How can it be "civilized" to make possible gracious living and humane relationships?

CHAPTER 2

THE CIVILIZING OF RUBY'S CENTER: HOW IT BEGAN

In an old, mixed-use neighborhood in a middle-sized city, there is a multipurpose community building in a tiny park. It has several small meeting rooms, an auditorium, and a kitchen. Its parking lot has recently been enlarged at the expense of grass and trees, since on-street parking is no longer legal on this busy street.

In addition to its evening use by various community groups, the auditorium serves as the site for a day care center, administered through the school district with federal funding. Forty-five children of ages three and four, all of them from low-income families as the funding requires, spend an average of nine to ten hours a day in this setting. Most are from single-parent families and have experienced a good deal of moving around in their short lives.

Because the space, both indoors and outdoors, is used for other purposes, everything must be put away almost daily. No permanent partitions can be built to break up the expanse of auditorium floor; any organization of the space for children's play depends on placement of storage shelves and screens. There are no windows except near the ceiling. The acoustics of the high-ceilinged space were designed for maximum sound projection, not for a variety of small-group activities going on simultaneously.

Senior citizens make daily use of the smaller meeting rooms and the pocket-sized grassy area outdoors. The children's outdoor activities are consequently confined to part of the parking lot, enclosed with movable fencing. Everything must be brought in at the end of the day to provide parking space for evening and weekend meetings.

Ruby, the new head teacher in this center, previously taught in a Head Start center located in a semi-rural area. The move to the day care program represents for her an increase in salary, in responsibility, and in frustration.

How do you provide an environment in which children can learn through play when there isn't anything to play with? Outdoors, children ride the few tricycles, fight, and are organized into circle games by the teachers. Indoors, there is far more running, noise, and tension than Ruby is comfortable with. Not only are children not absorbed in learning activities, but safety is a problem; a child was knocked down on the slippery floor just last week, hit his head on a chair leg, and required a frantic trip to the emergency hospital for three stitches. The teaching staff is conscientious and, with one exception Ruby is concerned about, they really care for children, but all are hard-pressed to find time to give the individual attention many of the children need. Too much of their time is spent intervening in children's difficulties with each other and in organizing activities to try to keep the children occupied.

Ruby doesn't have a prescribed curriculum to follow, or a whole-school schedule which determines when children can go outdoors and when they must be in their classroom. She doesn't have to teach kids to read. While she cares about their cognitive learning and the development of their curiosity and self-confidence in figuring out the workings of their world, her most immediate concern is to provide a safe, healthy, emotionally supportive environment for these young children--a home away from home during the long day care day. The problems she faces are tension and fighting, the lost look on the faces of some children, and boredom, which leads children to horse around, to misuse materials, or just to sit, watching but with no real interest.

She has far more space per child than most elementary teachers, but the space was never designed as an environment for children. Like a good many other preschool settings, it is bleak and makeshift, and must be shared with other groups of users whose needs are very different. Funding is less adequate than that available to the public schools (though the teaching staff has more autonomy than the average elementary teacher in determining how the budget for materials will be be spent). Income criteria for enroll-

ment make it likely that a rather large proportion of the children will have special emotional needs resulting from the uncertainties of poverty living. Given the setting and its limitations and demands, how can a teaching staff provide things for kids to do, minimize aggression and maximize caring, and ensure variety during the long day?

The words "teaching staff" point up an important difference between preschool programs and most elementary schools. The first-grade teacher in the school down the street is solely responsible for thirty-four six-year-olds in a self-contained classroom; she is with the children for four hours a day. Ruby, in contrast, is the team leader of a full-time teaching staff of six, including herself, supplemented by three part-time teaching assistants, all of whom share responsibility for forty-five three- and four-year-olds during an eleven-hour day.

When Ruby began this job, she was entering an ongoing program rather than beginning a new classroom on her own. Necessarily, she relied on the other staff members to explain to her how the program worked and what they expected her to do. She learned that they were accustomed to these established patterns of space use, time scheduling, and grouping of children.

The auditorium floor is simply a large expanse of undifferentiated space, except for the stage. The cupboards in which day care materials are kept, most of them on movable shelves mounted on casters, extend the length of the east wall, with high windows above them. The west wall gives access to lavatories, kitchen, and a storage area for folding tables and for cots; the tiny day care program office is tucked between this storage area and the stage wings. The two main entrance doors to the auditorium are at the south end, opposite the stage; they open onto a small porch and the parking lot.

The staff, Ruby learned, was accustomed to adapt this space for children's use by daily moving of tables and easels into the southwest corner for art activities (close to the lavatories and kitchen, which offer the only supply of running water), and by dividing the east side of the room in half with double block and book shelves extending out from the cupboard wall. Housekeeping areas were set up in the northeast and southeast corners, and small tables in between provided space for puzzles, construction toys, and other manipulative materials set out by the teachers. Each half of this side of the room then became "home base" for a group of fifteen children and two teachers, while the third group was scheduled for either art activities or outdoor play. The groups rotated during the morning, moving from one space to the next.

The piano, set below center stage, served as focus for an end-of-morning music time in which all forty-five children were expected to participate, but seldom did. The stage was defined as off-limits and required heroic teacher efforts to keep it that way. At lunch time, the art tables were cleared and additional tables were set up in front of the table storage area, to provide eating space for approximately fifty--children and teachers. The center of the room was empty and undefined, except by those children who used it for running (out one door, in the other, full length of the room to the piano--loud, dissonant crash--and around the racetrack again).

Teachers tended to look glassy-eyed by nap time, especially those whose day began at 7:00, and who did the major share of the furniture-moving. Fifty chairs, as just one item...

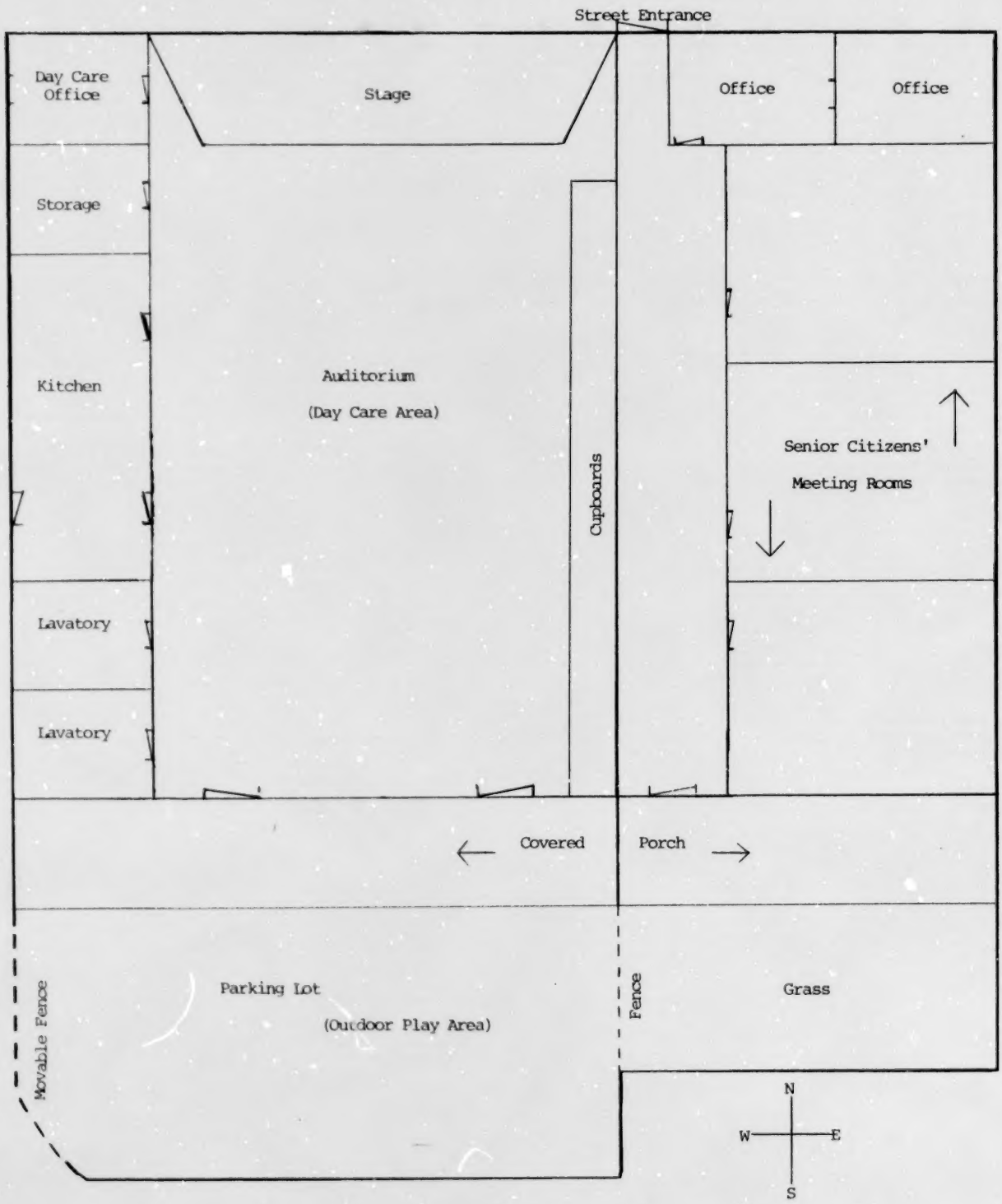
The doors to the outside lead to a ten-foot-wide covered porch facing on the parking lot, a section of which was enclosed (daily by the teachers) with portable fencing. Storage cupboards at each end of the porch hold six tricycles, an assortment of hollow blocks, several balls and bean bags, and a homemade bean bag board with holes to aim for. With fifteen children outdoors at a time, teachers were accustomed to organizing circle games in order to give everyone something to do; otherwise, some just sat and watched.

Staff schedules overlapped, as they inevitably do in a full day care program. One teacher and an assistant arrived by 7:00 a.m. to open the center, greet the early arrivals, set up equipment, and supervise quiet activities. By 8:00, another teacher and assistant arrived. The head teacher was due at 8:30 and another assistant at 9:00, to bring the staff up to its mid-day complement of six. At noon, the afternoon teacher arrived for a six-hour stint, freeing the head teacher for her 12:30 to 2:00 break.*

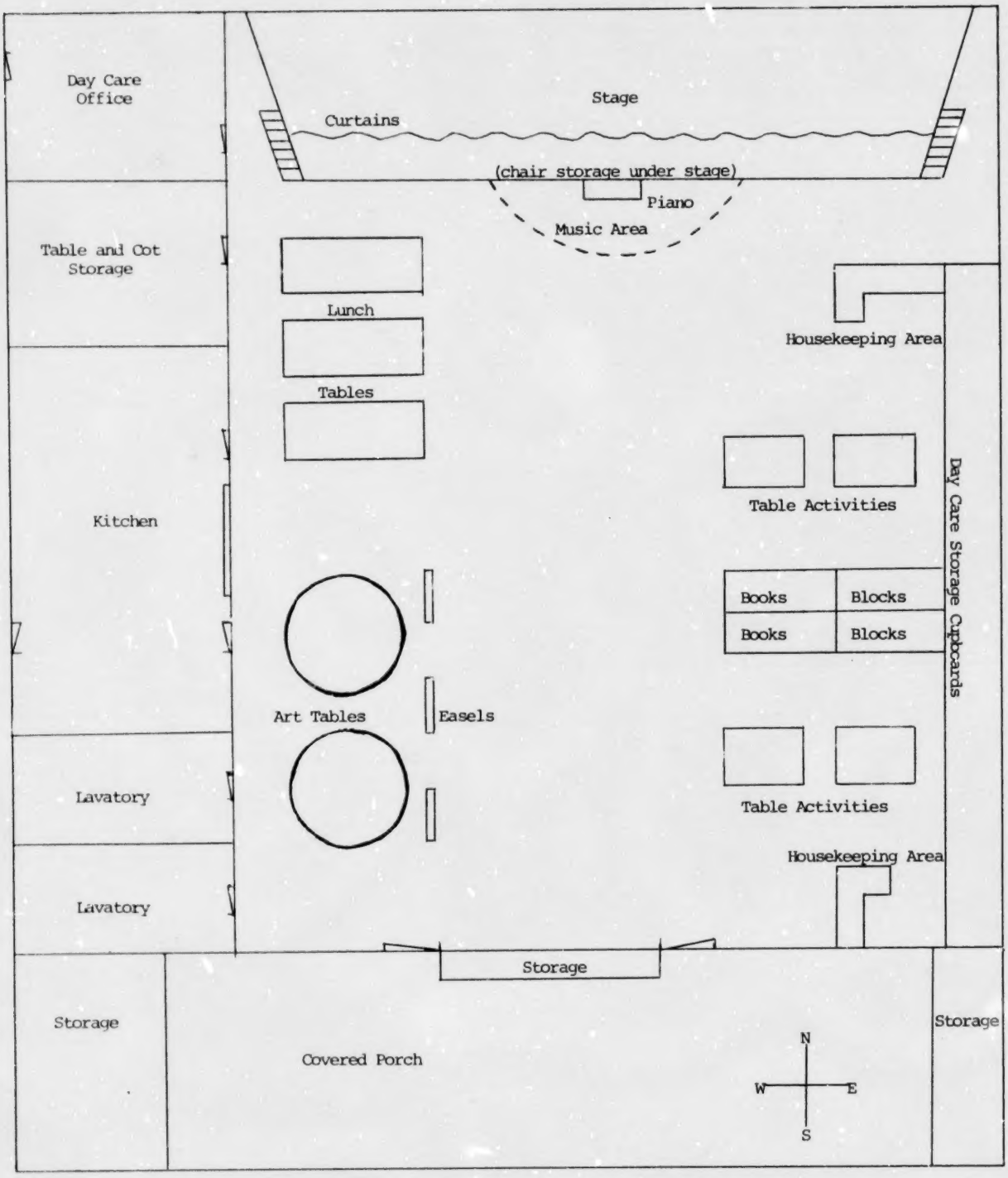
---

*Two additional assistants were present from 3:00 to 5:00, when morning staff began to leave.

Community Building



Lay Care Indoor Space
(Before)



(The head teacher's divided schedule, 8:30 to 12:30 and 2:00 to 6:00, enables her both to be active in the organized morning program and to be present to close the center in the evening. Officially, the time between 12:30 and 2:00 is her own, not to be spent at the center. In practice, the inevitable happens, and often she never gets away, especially since nap time is the only time in the day when the staff can meet.)

It is at nap time, as a matter of fact, that conversations about what's going wrong and what we can do about it, take place. Ruby has so many other adults to work with, all of them having to adapt to each other's styles, that they are perhaps as likely to be the source of problems as to suggest solutions. Still, she can try.

"What are we going to do?" she asked one day after a particularly chaotic Monday morning, when the staff had finally gotten all the children to sleep and gratefully settled down with coffee at the table in the kitchen. "Let's just brainstorm wildly. Can you think of anything at all that might make the day go more smoothly?"

"Kick out Douglas and Ricky." "Lock Jenny in the closet." "Give me a month's vacation with pay." These were among the milder suggestions from a tired group of adults. Ruby let it all come out and added some wry comments of her own. Then she tried again. "What bugs you most about the room? Let's make a list of complaints."

Complaints came thick and fast, and in five minutes, Ruby had written this list:

No windows
30-foot ceiling
No separate classrooms
All that space for running
Ugly and bare
Piano out there to be banged on
Books keep getting left in the middle of the floor
No sink
It's full of children!
No quiet spaces
Nowhere comfortable to sit
Standing on that hard floor all day hurts my feet
Nowhere to get away from each other
Moving the furniture every day
Kids won't stay off the stage

Obviously it was easier to think of what was wrong than it would be to think about making changes. But one step at a time.

"Could we sort out this list into two lists: problems that can't be solved and problems that might be?" This was harder. But with some disagreements, these lists evolved:

Insoluble Problems	Soluble Problems
No windows	All that space for running
30-foot ceiling	Ugly and bare
No separate classrooms	Piano out there to be banged on
No sink	Books in the middle of the floor
It's full of children!	No quiet spaces
Moving the furniture every day	Nowhere comfortable to sit
	Standing on that hard floor all day
	Nowhere to get away from each other
	Kids won't stay off the stage

"Why is the stage off limits?" Ruby wanted to know. No one really knew, it turned out, until Dolores, the veteran teacher at the center, explained, "We used to let kids use it, but someone fell off and got hurt one day. It was just another running space, and we couldn't have a teacher there all the time to supervise. So we said, 'Stay off the the stage,' but that doesn't work either."

"What activities did you set up there?" Ruby asked.

"Oh, we didn't," said Dolores. "No one was about to start lugging furniture up those stairs."

"Is anyone interested enough in having a quiet space and a separate classroom to do a

little lugging, with the children's help?"

"Me!" burst out Jan. "I'd do practically anything for some private space. It isn't the furniture-moving that gets to me; it's all the people all the time. What's your idea?"

"Would you want to plan a small-group time for half your group for maybe half an hour every morning? You could go behind the stage curtains and set it up any way you want."

"Would I ever! There are some things I'd really like to do with those older kids--pre-reading games and numbers. But what would Mayella do if I took off?"

"Girl, you take off with *those* kids and you can go anywhere you pleases for as long as you pleases," rumbled Mayella. "Six, eight kids, I'm just fine by myself. It's all the standing and chasing that gets to my poor feet."

"Why don't you sit down?" asked Sally innocently.

"Ain't nowhere to sit down," retorted Mayella. "My big butt won't fit those little chairs."

"Anyone got a rocking chair at home? A grandma with a rocking chair? A garage sale with a rocking chair?" Ruby was hopeful.

"Sure, I got an old one at home," Mayella, of all people, volunteered. "But I ain't gonna bring it here for them kids to wreck."

"They can't wreck it if you're sitting in it," said Ruby.

"How can I sit in it," asked Mayella, "when I got work to do? I gotta take kids to paint, and I gotta take kids outdoors, and I gotta take kids to the bathroom. When you think I get a chance to sit down?"

"Do you like taking kids outside?"

"No way! It's even harder on my feet standing out there than in here. But they need all that fresh air, so I take 'em."

"Do any of you like taking kids outside?"

"I do!" from Sally and Paula, with a half-hearted "I guess I do" from Jan. Sally added, "I'd go stir crazy, inside all day. I'm the one who needs the fresh air."

"If there were only something to *do* outside," sighed Jan. "That grim parking lot..."

"Look, right now everyone takes turns doing all the same things," Ruby said. "Is that the way you want it? Or are we different people who should be doing different things?"

"What do you mean?" asked Sally, her eyes beginning to sparkle.

"The kids are different people too," Ruby went on. "Some of the little ones really need a quiet place and a lap. If Mayella was sitting in her rocking chair, she'd have a lap. Would that be O.K., Mayella?"

"Sure, I like the little, cuddly ones," said Mayella. "We can sit and take it easy together. It's the big, noisy, fast ones I keep yelling at, they distract me so. But this is supposed to be a school, ain't it? School teachers don't sit and cuddle babies. I ain't a teacher, just an aide, but I wasn't ever told I could sit and cuddle babies. I get paid for this job; I'm supposed to work."

"That's what I thought, too," said Jan. "I'm supposed to be teaching these children, aren't I?"

"All day?" Ruby asked quietly. "What do you want them to learn? How do little children learn?"

"What are you getting at?" asked Jan, her back up a bit. "What do you want me to say?"

"I guess I'd like us to think about what we're trying to do here," replied Ruby. "We all get so tired, and when we're tired we're not good for children, much less for ourselves.

We don't like a lot of what's happening with the children. If their mothers weren't working, these children would be at home. What would they be doing at home?"

"Watching T.V., that's all." Jan was scornful. "These mothers don't do anything with their kids at home."

"Take it easy, Jan," Dolores said quickly. "'These mothers' are a lot of different people. They all have to work all day, and at the end of the day they go home and have to take care of their kids and their houses. But still some of them let the kids help set the table (and some of them *make* the kids help set the table), and some sing their kids to sleep, and some let the kids fall asleep in the living room listening to the grownups talk (which is pretty nice when you think about it)."

"If you were at home with kids, Jan, you'd be a good mother, right?" Ruby intervened in the uncomfortable vibrations between Dolores and Jan. "What would you do with them all day?"

"Well, they'd have toys to play with. And they could help me with the housework. And we'd go to the store, and the park. And I'd read to them..."

"Wouldn't you teach them anything?"

"Sure, all the time. I like to talk to kids, and I'd play games with them, and they'd learn a lot by playing with their toys and by watching me."

"Could we run a day care center that way?" asked Ruby.

"With forty-five kids?" Mayella was incredulous.

"Maybe if the kids didn't have to do everything together all the time..." Sally was beginning to light up. "Could we have smaller groups, and places for children to be alone?"

"You know something about homes," Ruby said. "They have different rooms to do different things in. Suppose we had three or four little rooms instead of one big one. How would you want to use them?"

"One for each age group, I guess," said Sally. "And if we had four we could use one for art stuff...But that's not what you were saying--then we'd have the same kinds of things going on in three rooms. Could we do it differently?"

"Think about us and the different things we like to do," Ruby said. "Or about the different kinds of things the kids do. Suppose we had a quiet room with Mayella in her rocking chair, and pillows and stuffed animals and some little toys and books? And suppose Jan had a room with puzzles and games, and buttons to sort and a flannel board and a chalk board and paper and crayons? And a room for art activities. And if we had four rooms, what would you put in the fourth?"

"Blocks?"

"Housekeeping?"

"But Mayella couldn't just stay in her rocking chair," Sally protested, "because we'd all have to be taking the kids from one room to the other."

"Couldn't they take themselves?" asked Ruby, "and choose where they want to be?"

"Are you kidding?" burst out Paula. "Excuse me if that sounded rude, but I don't think that would work at all; we'd have more running around than we have now. And I'm tired of talking about these rooms we don't have. What we've got is one great big auditorium, and that's all we're gonna have. What can we do with that?"

"O.K.," said Ruby. "What if, instead of being responsible for a group of kids and taking them from one place to the other, you were responsible for a *place*? If we had a quiet area, and the art area, and outdoors, and the stage with games and things, and a block and housekeeping area, that's five spaces with five adults. The sixth could be a floater and help kids choose where they want to be. Would that begin to be more like rooms? Could it work, Paula, or would it be a mess?"

Paula had been about to protest. Instead, she thought about it. "What if I'm outdoors

and none of the kids choose to come out? Or suppose *all* of them choose to come out? What happens then?"

"We'd have to pay attention to each other, I guess. The floater could help with that. Maybe we could set a limit for each area and help the kids learn to count numbers of people. Or we could be flexible and move from empty areas to crowded ones on the spur of the moment. We'd have to find out just how we can work together."

Paula was unconvinced. "But I don't see how this will cut down on running. I think it will increase it."

"How much of the running we have now is by kids escaping from their groups when they don't want to do what their group is doing?"

"Some," admitted Paula. "Lots, actually. Most of it."

"Hey," Sally exclaimed. "If we had some barriers in the middle of the room, that would break up the running."

"Sally, you..."

"Hi!" broke in a small voice, and two cheerful faces appeared in the doorway.

"Darn, they're already waking up," muttered Sally. Dolores got up to go with the children.

"Well, we're only beginning," said Ruby. "Is there anything we can do this week?"

"If you'll bring your car to pick up my rocking chair, I'll be glad to sit in it for you," offered Mayella with a grin. "But I still don't think that's my job."

"Then consider it a day off, and let's try it," said Ruby. "If we let the children from Jan and Mayella's group choose where to be tomorrow morning, that will free both of them to do something different. Mayella can be a center for quiet activities; Jan, do you want to try the stage?"

"Sure," said Jan. "Can I make it invitational, not free-for-all?"

"Try it," Ruby replied.

"Where do you want me to sit?" asked Mayella.

"Why don't we try switching the block and bookshelves around? If we put both block shelves next to each other, facing the stage, then we could put the bookshelves at right angles to each other behind them, with the rocking chair in the middle. What else should we have there?"

"Little animals and Tinkertoys, maybe?" suggested Sally.

"What are the children going to sit on?" Mayella asked.

"You!" laughed Sally.

"I'm wide enough for two at a time, but that's *all*," retorted Mayella.

"The children are happy on the floor, but is there any way we could make it softer?" asked Ruby.

"Want to use my grandmother's rag rug?" asked Mayella. "It's raggedy, but the colors are pretty."

"Mayella, you're going to make this place just like home," exclaimed Ruby with delight. "Pillows, anyone?"

"I've got three from my old couch," said Jan. "I'll bring 'em; they're just in the way at home."

"O.K.," said Ruby. "We need to get back to work. Mayella, I'll come by your house on my way to work in the morning. I'll come early enough to give you a ride, and then I can help set things up."

For Ruby, one of the revelations of this discussion was Mayella's part in it. Ruby had been convinced that Mayella didn't really like children much and wasn't very competent with them. She moved slowly through the day, scolding children and complaining about her aching feet; she often got trapped into trying to catch runners and stage-invaders who could elude her with easy four-year-old grace.

Now, for the first time, Ruby began to have some empathy for the heavy-bodied, slow-moving older woman who did her job doggedly, but without joy. How can you enjoy your job when four-year-olds tease you and your feet hurt? Paired with energetic Jan in a lively group of older fours, Mayella was a fish out of water. Given the possibility of being a warm lap in a rocking chair, she brightened up and even offered to share her things from home. Would she really be able to make herself at home in the center and be a warm presence for children? To discover that, it was worth it to Ruby to come to work early, picking up Mayella and her things on the way.

By the end of the week, the center was unquestionably a nicer place to be. A small group of younger children had gravitated to Mayella in her rocking chair, snuggling on her lap and on cushions at her feet. They had begun to bring her books to read to them--Mayella, who avoided all opportunities for reading aloud. "Can someone read to these children?" she appealed to Ruby. "You can," Ruby replied firmly. "If there's too many words for the children (she avoided saying, "for you"), just talk about the pictures with them. They can help tell the story. Or take home a book and practice reading it out loud; it takes some practice when you're not used to it."

Jan had improvised a schoolroom on stage, using the floor instead of tables and chairs, and carrying her materials in a big, bright bag. Her "by invitation only" rule delighted the older children and made her a focus of attention. This was a chance to play "real school" with a teacher, and children vied for a place on her daily list.

On Wednesday, Sally had pounced on two racers about to crash on the piano. "I need some strong moving men," she announced importantly. "We are going to move this piano, and it's heavy. How many moving men do you think we'll need?" They discovered that two were nowhere near enough, but willing helpers were found, and with Sally as foreman, the piano was moved over to the floor space at the far end of the stage, with its back to the main room. Here, it was completely removed from the traffic pattern and offered room for only a small group of singers or music-makers to cluster around it in the corner. To celebrate the move, Sally sat down at the piano and had an impromptu sing with her moving men.

"I know I should have asked," she exclaimed apologetically to Ruby half an hour later. "The idea just came to me, and my mother always says I act first and think later. Shall I move it back for music time?"

"Let's just skip music time today and see if anyone complains," suggested Ruby quietly. "If you don't play the chords to bring everyone together, maybe it won't occur to them."

No one mentioned it.

On Friday, Ruby again stayed for coffee with the staff during nap time. "Any new problems?" she asked.

"What happened to music time?" asked Dolores. "It just dawned on me this morning that we haven't been having it. Sally, did you forget? Or is there a new plan I haven't heard about?"

Sally explained. "Do you miss it?" she asked.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, but frankly, no," Dolores replied. "You're really good with music, but no one can keep the attention of that many preschoolers. I'm glad not to have to keep shushing them."

"I'm having such fun," smiled Jan. "The stage is a really good private place, even though it's too big. The floor's kind of cold to sit on though. Are there any mats or something like that around? I don't want to start taking tables and chairs up there."

"I've got two ideas," Ruby said. "See how they strike you. We haven't got a whole lot of money, but if we make some things and shop at thrift stores we can stretch it. Would anyone like to scout thrift stores for little rugs and baby blankets and pillows? Maybe some more stuffed animals while we're at it?"

Faces were carefully blank. "It's a long work day, you know," Paula said finally. "I've got my own shopping to do when I leave here. I can't think about the center all day and all night too."

"Would you be willing to take a few children along and go during your work day?" asked Ruby. "There are three thrift shops within four blocks."

Paula was startled. "Don't the children have to stay here?"

"No," said Ruby. "We have parent permission to take them on walking trips."

"Don't *I* have to stay here? I don't think I'd want to manage more than three kids in a store. Could you get along without me?"

"I'll take care of all your extra kids if I can have a turn to go shopping too," volunteered Sally eagerly. "It would be so good to be able to get away from this place sometimes. I need variety. I'll bet the kids do too."

"O.K. Idea number two," went on Ruby. "If I brought my portable sewing machine and we bought some cotton yardage--there's another shopping trip for someone--would anyone like to stitch some covers for pillows and for some foam mats?"

"I could do it faster at home," said Dolores.

"So could I," explained Ruby, "but efficiency isn't the point. I think children need opportunities to watch adults work, and to help as much as they can, and to participate in the whole process of making things our center needs. 'Dolores sewing' could be a learning center for one day or lots of days."

"I don't know if I'm that patient, but I'll try," said Dolores. "I used to sew at home all the time when my own kids were little. If we're trying to make this place more like home, I guess I should be doing it here."

CHAPTER 3

DIMENSION: SOFTNESS/HARDNESS

Introducing greater softness into an environment makes it more comfortable; it may also be a way of reducing tension in both children and adults. When we started thinking about softness as a dimension of programs for children, we looked at a lot of things that seemed to make a difference to children's experience in the environment. These were the indicators we decided to use in measuring the softness of a day care center, both indoors and outdoors:

Child/adult cozy furniture: rockers, couches, stuffed chairs
Large carpet or rug: half or full size
Grass to be on
Sand to be in: box or area
Dirt to dig in
Furry animals to hold
Sling swings
Play dough
Very messy materials: finger paint, clay, mud, water added to sand
Water as an activity
"Laps" (available for children to sit on)

The basic quality common to all the softness indicators is sensory responsiveness. When you touch water, or a swing, or a pillow, or a furry animal, it responds to your touch. It moves. It doesn't just resist you like a hard floor or chair. Sensory responsiveness is a crucial quality in any leisure environment--and if full day care cannot be characterized as a leisure environment, its inhabitants--big and little--will almost invariably experience frequent tension and fatigue.

There have been few responsive things in Ruby's center, except the people, and they keep intruding on each other. By restructuring the program to provide for individual differences of tempo and style, and by suggesting the addition of some soft pillows and mats and such, Ruby is making a beginning at creating an environment in which both adults and children can be more at home.

Day Care as a Good Home

A home is a behavior setting whose purpose for existence is the meeting of day-to-day human needs. Even a home which provides day care to non-family members still functions as a home. To fulfill this function, homes have a physical setting which has evolved to meet these needs; and society socializes its members to function in homes.

Group care is a behavior setting whose clearest and most obvious purpose is to keep a group of children safe and happy while away from their families. This setting is a much more artificial one, lacking any broader purpose, and frequently inhabited by people who are brought together merely by the accidents of hiring practices and rules of eligibility. Because the number of children is usually much larger than that in a home, there has been a strong tendency for all but the smallest centers to adopt as a model not the home, but the institution which most commonly deals with children in groups, namely, the school.

Adults who work with children in day care ordinarily refer to themselves as teachers. If they are untrained, as many are, the word "teacher" seems to suggest to them the role they themselves experienced in elementary school, in which the teacher presents information to children in a group, gives them follow-up assignments, and watches over their play at recess. This perception of role does not include the emphasis on sensory tactile exploring nor the nurturance of autonomy and initiative so important to development in early childhood.

Those who are more sophisticated appear to take as model the role of the nursery school teacher, which does include these emphases. However, the nursery school teacher does not have to deal with the arrangement of the environment and scheduling necessary to enable adults, as well as children, to make it through the long day. Nursery school teachers are trained to promote peer interaction and cognitive development; they need not be concerned with the nurturing that goes with sleeping and eating and contact with real life situations, since this will be provided by the parents after school.

The Home as a Workable Model for Day Care

Suppose that all day care had as its goal the provision of the experiences found in behavior settings called homes? Almost all adults, regardless of amount of special training, have experience with homes and how they work. For some time to come, many centers will be staffed by adults with little training. If centers concentrated on making their environments more homelike, and if staff were encouraged to act as home-makers instead of teachers, they would have a much more familiar experience as a guide-line for decision-making.

In a center which looked more like a home, there would be easy chairs to provide quiet corners for privacy; there would be a couch and adult-sized chairs where staff could sit comfortably and rest occasionally, instead of standing or perching on tiny nursery school chairs. Children would be involved in the daily operation of the center, like putting sheets in the wash and helping with the cooking.

There would be the recognition of the importance of variability in the adult-child ratio so that every child would have some individualized time with adults during the day. These opportunities occur naturally in a setting which provides enough to do for children and comfortable, accessible places for staff. Adults such as the postman, plumber, or salesmen who come into the center for business will not be carefully isolated from the children. Some centers have found ways to operate like this. I am proposing that it could happen more easily if adults had a familiar model to emulate. (Prescott, 1978, pp. 17-18)

Summary

The soft/hard dimension indicates the extent to which an environment is responsive to its inhabitants, especially on a sensuous/tactile level. A good play environment, in which children choose their activities, must, in our experience, include a large share of softness in order to work well. As one teacher in a primary school "Discovery Room" described her experience:

> *...we found that some days were so very much more rewarding and pleasant for the children and adults than others. It became obvious that the specially good days were characterized by more than usual sensory-oriented experiences. This trend became so predictable that planning for these kinds of experiences has become a major focus in the room. We now know that days when our noses tell us that the room is full of cooking smells, when there are good messy things to explore with our hands, when there is music in the room and it is filled with busy, involved people enjoying what they are doing--these are our memorable times when after the day is over and we're very tired, we feel good about it all.* (McCormick, 1975, p. 29)

The younger the children, the more essential softness becomes in an environment. Infants need response rather than recalcitrance in the materials they encounter (there is plenty of recalcitrance in their world already, from hard floors on up)--things that move and flow in response to their experimentation. The greatest delight in a new infant-toddler center we have seen is the amount of water available to children, in varied forms--a counter-height tiled "bathtub" for bathing babies, with a sprinkler-hose attachment; a long child-height sink with warm and cold faucets and an easily drained floor; a drinking fountain; a hose on the outside faucet. Wherever you look, there's another alcove with running water. Unquestionably, the children in this program will be more relaxed than those without access to water; that's the effect water has on babies. This environment, unlike most, is planned for easy maintenance when wet, to help adults stay relaxed too.

As people grow older, they can deal with more hardness. Most of our work and public environments overestimate this capacity, however, with architecture

> *...designed to be strong and resistant to human imprint. To the inhabitants it seems impervious, impersonal, and inorganic. Lady Allen, who pioneered the adventure playground in Great Britain, was appalled at American play yards which she described as "an administrator's heaven and a child's hell...asphalt barriers--yards behind wire mesh screen barriers" built primarily for ease and economy of maintenance...*
>
> *Most of these efforts to harden the environment have had the avowed purpose of increasing security. Frequently this reason is a coverup for a desire to maintain order, discipline, or control.* (Sommer, 1974, pp. 2-3)

These efforts don't work, says Sommer. The harder the environment of housing project, park, or prison, the more subject it is to vandalism. Hard environments designed for mechanical efficiency take their toll in other aspects of human effectiveness, as ads for relaxant drugs, alcohol consumption, and interpersonal aggression testify. "Civilizing" work--as well as play--environments can pay off, nowhere more than in educational settings. Learning is an individual process, too complex to predict; efforts to streamline it have not proved effective.

A civilized environment includes softness. It also includes choices for individuals. In studying day care programs, we have come to believe that the most important difference among programs involves choice-making, especially in terms of who initiates children's activities--adults or children. The open/closed dimension is concerned with the choices offered by an environment and the materials in it, as well as by teachers.

CHAPTER 4

DIMENSION: OPEN/CLOSED

Program, materials, and storage patterns can all be rated on this dimension. The openness of a *program* depends on who makes most of the choices of children's activities--adults or children. In an open program, a child has many choices; for a substantial part of the day, she may decide what she wants to do when. In a closed program, adults initiate for children most of the time.

Looking at *materials*, the open/closed dimension describes the extent to which restrictions inherent in a material impose a clear and arbitrary solution. Water, paint, dough, and sand are open; puzzles, workbook tasks, tracing patterns are closed. A lot of other things fit somewhere in between:

Closed: Both the goal and the mode of relationship among the parts are constrained. The number of alternatives is exceedingly limited. Examples: puzzles, form boards, matching games.

Relatively open: Either the goal or the mode of relationship, but not both, is constrained. The number of alternatives is greater, but not unlimited. Examples: floor blocks, Tinkertoys, Cuisenaire rods.

Open: Neither the goal nor the mode of relationship is constrained. The number of alternatives is unlimited. Examples: dough, collage, sand, water play.

The degree to which *storage* is open is ordinarily directly related to the openness of the program. In looking at the variety of storage patterns in classrooms, we have characterized them as follows:

Closed: Storage behind low but locked doors, or up high and behind doors, or up high and on open shelves, but placed in such a way (or so high) that visibility to children is impeded.

Relatively open: Stuff is easily visible--not reachable, or behind low, unlocked doors.

Open: Open shelves and/or cupboards and sheds whose doors are open when children are in the setting. Stuff is visible and mostly reachable.

Open/Closed Structure in Ruby's Center

The day care center, as its program has been organized, provides a not-very-workable balance of closed and open structure. Working with groups of children, teachers make many of the choices of activities. However, relatively few challenging closed tasks are available for children who need them. In consequence, most of the running and horsing around take place among older children bored by the activities they are supposed to be doing, or frustrated by having to do them in too large a group.

Ruby is especially concerned about offering a more open structure with more individual choices for children. Jan, on the other hand, trained as an elementary teacher, is eager for a chance to "teach," to set tasks and help children learn the answers. In a group of fifteen, arbitrarily age-grouped, both she and the children often ended up frustrated. In a voluntary, "special" group of half a dozen, meeting in previously forbidden space, everyone is having a lovely time.

What Jan is doing with her group of four-and-a-half- and five-year-olds are school-type activities. They play games involving letter recognition, initial consonant sounds ("I have a bird. What shall I feed him?" "Bananas." "Bubble gum." "Bugs."

"Ice cream." "Does ice cream have a buh sound, Jamie?" "I like ice cream," responds Jamie, for whom buh sounds are still a future discovery. Jan is willing to accept these differences among children and not press for "right" answers, even while she encourages those children who recognize the patterns to think of them), rhyming words, sets, and numbers (button-sorting by number, color, and size is a favorite activity).

Another sort of closed-task challenge is growing out of a real-life need. There is a lot of physical work required of the teachers in this center by the necessity to get everything out and put everything away daily. With one or two exceptions, adults have been in the habit of doing these tasks without involving the children. It takes too much time to have children help, and they aren't big enough to be really helpful anyway. These were the explanations Ruby got when she raised the question one day. It was Paula who took the discussion further:

"You know, I've been wondering about that. I helped in a Montessori school once, years ago. It was only for a few months, because we moved, and I never really understood all the program. But those kids used to do real work. They set the table and cut vegetables and poured juice and cleaned the tables. They liked it. So did I!"

"How did things ever get done in time?" Jan was incredulous.

"There was lots of time scheduled to do the work in," Paula explained. "And the teachers taught the children how to do it. Children role-played it in the group before they did it on their own. Work was seen as one of the important learning experiences in the program, so it wasn't rushed to go on to something else."

"You know, you might have something there," mused Jan. "I've never worked in a program like that. But neither have I worked in a program like this before, with such a long day and with so few learning materials for children. Maybe we should start taking work seriously as part of the curriculum. At the very least, it would fill up time and keep the kids busy."

And so they thought through the tasks there were to be done, and which ones children might do, and how they could learn to do them well.

Help push out shelves in the morning
Get out a mat or a rug to play on
Get out what you're going to play with
Put it away when you're done
Prepare and serve morning snack
Clean up after snack
Clean up play areas
Help put away things in late afternoon

"Say, this is just like chores at home, ain't it?" said Mayella. "But these little kids don't do things very well. Won't it be more trouble than it's worth?"

"I think it's a matter of showing them how to do things slowly and carefully," said Ruby. "Even a three-year-old can spread out a small rug if he realizes he's got to pull each corner out, not too hard. All-day care should really set a slow pace, and then fill it with interesting tasks which children can take seriously and get absorbed in."

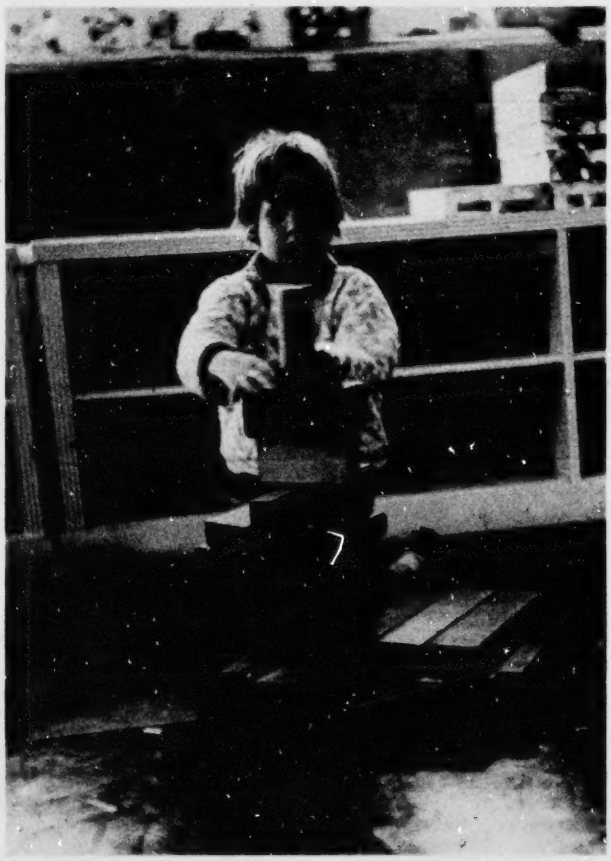
"And the bigger children can help the smaller ones," pointed out Paula. "That's really important. Here we have children of different ages, like in a big family. I've always thought it was silly to separate them by age and lose all that good help. If we set up some regular chores and ways of doing them, the big kids can take charge and see that they get done. Less work for us, more good experience for them. Neat!"

Finding a Balance Between Open and Closed Tasks

Closed tasks provide important challenges to children who are ready for them. If whole-group activities are offered, the teacher can look for activities which permit but don't require closure, offering success at different levels. Thus, failure, competition, and discipline problems are avoided, and the teacher's time is freer. Since she's not trying to enforce a single standard, she can become involved in extending individual children's experiences, moving from one to the other casually, sharing enjoyment, rather than pressuring.

The only children who thrive in a closed environment are those for whom the challenges match. Closed structure environments in which many children are apathetic or rebellious are probably matching badly. The demands on the children are too easy or too hard, and so they refuse, or are unable, to take them seriously.

Similarly, open structure which doesn't provide adequate challenges for individual children isn't educational. It may be simply pleasant time together, or, especially if it's all day every day, it may become chaotic as children get bored and introduce dissension to liven things up. When chaos occurs, a teacher needs to consider ways of offering more closed structure, and/or more complexity.



CHAPTER 5

DIMENSION: SIMPLE/COMPLEX

When we first started making research observations in day care centers, we spent a good deal of time looking at the equipment and materials available for children's outdoor free play. Some day care centers had lots of wheel toys, lots of climbing structures, lots of swings, and we duly counted them to get a picture of how many different things there were for children to do. Later, we characterized them as kinds of things to do--vehicles, climbers, rockers, and so on. However, it was also becoming evident to us that some equipment and materials held children's interest far longer than others. Eventually, we came up with this analytic scheme (Kritchevsky and Prescott, 1969):

Simple: A simple unit has one obvious use and does not have sub-parts or a juxtaposition of materials which enable a child to manipulate or improvise.

Complex: A complex unit has sub-parts or a juxtaposition of two essentially different play materials which enable the child to manipulate or improvise. Examples: table with tools, playhouse with supplies. Also scored as complex are those single play materials and objects which encourage substantial improvisation and/or have a considerable element of unpredictability. Examples: all art activities, a table with books to look at, an area with animals.

Super: A super-unit has three or more play materials juxtaposed. Examples: dough table with tools; tunnel, movable boards and boxes, and large crates; sand table with tools and water.

A super-unit, we discovered, was about eight times as effective in holding a child's attention as a simple unit; a complex unit was about four times as effective.

A complex environment contributes to lengthening children's attention span. In the long day care day, this is a goal worth considering.

Making an Environment More Complex

Cooking is among the nicest of complex activities, because of all its sensory richness--touch, smell, and taste. In day care, where meals together are part of the program, and a kitchen is readily available, it may be a good place to begin. And because serving snacks is one of the ways in which teachers in Ruby's center have been waiting on children, and their new watchword is to help children to help themselves, the kitchen is about to become an activity area.

Lunch is cooked and served daily at the center by a cook who comes in from 10:00 to 2:00. This center is fortunate to have its cook; she raised ten children of her own and isn't tired of little ones yet. She has always been willing to let a child or two sit on a high stool in the kitchen to watch her work. She's too busy to let them really help--but she won't mind if teachers and children use her kitchen while she's not there, as long as they clean up after themselves.

Ruby was able, then, to suggest snack preparation as a regular activitity for children, taking advantage of both the kitchen and the pass-through service counter between the kitchen and main room.

"Some of the children don't get breakfast and really aren't good for anything until after snack time. Instead of serving snack to everyone at mid-morning, why don't we have a regular cooking/nutrition center open from about 8:00 to 9:30, to give children a chance

for a wide variety of food preparation experiences as well as eating? We could sometimes use the kitchen and really cook, and sometimes just use the serving counter or tables and fix raw food. We might have to limit the number of children actually preparing food, but they could set it out on the counter for anyone to come eat and could monitor helpings if there's a limit. Can't you just imagine Danny telling people, 'You can have two carrot sticks," and playing policeman? He'd be in his element."

"I've never cooked with children. What can they do?" asked Jan.

"Lots!" responded Paula enthusiastically. "They can cut fruit and raw vegetables and cheese (and learn to use not-very-sharp knives carefully), and learn to spread peanut butter on crackers, and make pudding and gelatin, and cook eggs, and make toast and cookies, and..."

"Would you like to be in charge of the cooking center, Paula?" interrupted Ruby with a smile.

"I'd love to," said Paula. "Then I get to eat too!"

"And you never get fat, either," muttered Sally. "Some people have all the luck."

Inevitably, this discussion went further than ideas for learning experiences for children to a reexamination of the whole structure of the day--again with an eye to reducing the sheer physical labor required of teachers. Ruby again:

"If more food were available during a lot of the day for children to help themselves, I think we'd be less pressured when serving meals and snacks. Do you realize we have lunch for fifty every day? Who in her right mind would invite fifty people for lunch--and set up all the furniture for them? I woke up last night thinking about it. Couldn't we serve lunch in shifts, so we don't have to set up all those tables and chairs?"

"Wouldn't that make it harder for Rosie?" asked Dolores. "She's used to getting everything ready at once. She might not want to change."

"We'd have to ask her. But if I were doing the cooking, I'd find it easier to cook some things in smaller batches. I bet she'd at least be willing to try."

"How would we do it? If some children started eating early, wouldn't all the others want to too?"

"Would they? What about those kids who don't even want to come to lunch when it's time? And if Jan's group was on the stage when the first lunch group began, and maybe Sally was singing with some children in the piano corner, and some children were finishing up art activities, I don't think lunch would be all that much of a big thing for everyone. And if we let children leave when they're through and other children take their places, we wouldn't have to rush the slow eaters or make the fast ones sit so long. If we began lunch at 11:00 with the sleepiest and hungriest ones, then we could take them to their nap area--on stage, maybe, behind the curtains where it'd be private--before the rest finish their lunch. And have their song or story time right at their beds--some would drop off to sleep, and we wouldn't have the hassle of sleepyheads before lunch. Lupe fell asleep in the middle of her macaroni and cheese today."

"Rosie, here we come," said Paula under her breath. But she looked hopeful.

Another day, another set of problems and possible solutions--again in the direction of increased complexity.

"You know what we need out there? We need a big, complicated play structure for children to climb up and down on and hide under and play bad guys in," said Sally one day after a long morning supervising the yard. "When I visited my sister on my vacation, we went over to the nursery school where her children go, and there must have been a dozen children involved for over an hour on their jungle gym-plus slides-plus cable spools and ladders. It was lovely."

"You gonna pick it up and stick it in the cupboard every day?" asked Mayella sourly.

(Her feet were hurting again.) "Them rich kids with their fancy nursery schools got that kind of stuff. All we got's what we got."

"My sister's not rich," muttered Sally. But she was not to be diverted. "Couldn't we do something?"

"Anything big enough to be interesting, we couldn't move--and there isn't room for it in that yard anyway," said Ruby. "I've thought and thought, but frankly, I'm stumped."

"The *stage*," said Dolores slowly. "The stage is at least four feet high and it's there all the time. Couldn't we use it in some way? How could it be made into a climbing place?"

Ruby impetuously hugged her. "That's it!" she exclaimed. "I've just been thinking about outdoors--I never thought about an indoor structure. The stage is a natural. What would we need, to make it work? What do we want the kids to be able to do?"

"Climb." "Slide." "Crawl through small spaces." "Invent dramatic games that keep them busy with each other for a *long* time."

"If we had short ladders with cleats on the top, and smooth boards with cleats at the top, we'd have slides and the way to climb up to them," said Dolores. "But the bottom ends would slip on the floor, and the floor's hard for falling on. Could we get matting or something?"

"Do you know those cargo net affairs that are made out of webbing instead of rope?" asked Sally. "They're light-weight and provide a wiggly sort of climbing experience. The top edge could just hook onto the edge of the stage. I don't know how you'd anchor the bottom end, though."

"If we had gym mats we could let the kids jump off the stage onto them. A few are really ready for that kind of challenge," suggested Jan. "And couldn't we just move a few tables against the stage for climbing up and down on?"

"How fast would all our kids destroy one of those long wire-and-cloth tunnels? Maybe too fast to be worth the cost--but maybe not. That might be better outdoors than in, though," ventured Dolores, thinking out loud.

"I think we've got the beginnings of it," rejoiced Ruby. "Are boards too heavy to carry? The other things aren't. I guess we'll have to go lift a few and see."

CHAPTER 6

DIMENSION: INTRUSION/SECLUSION

This dimension has to do with boundaries--who and what come through them. We are accustomed to look at the permeability of two types of boundaries:

1. Boundaries between the center and people and things which come from outside the center.

2. Boundaries between people and things which belong to the center.

Looking first within the center, to what extent does the physical setting permit children to be alone? To what extent does it encourage small-group activities? Or does it keep children in continual contact as members of a large group?

Boundaries Within the Center

Space use in the day care center has been organized by a combination of table activities and partially screened units. The screening is minimal, however, with only the furniture arrangements in the housekeeping areas providing anything like a real insulated unit. Elsewhere, the intersection of block cupboards and wall provide partial screening, while the easels partially screen the art activity tables.

These arrangements throw children together most of the time, and also make a lot of work for teachers, who have been accustomed to set up not only the tables, but also the materials to be used on them. Most of the large room is in use most of the time, with the central undefined area a natural, if unintended, racetrack.

It was Dolores, who with Paula is responsible for opening the center at 7:00 a.m., who first raised a question about these arrangements. "I've been thinking," she said casually to the other staff members during nap time (Ruby wasn't present), "about this whole idea of not waiting on children. Every day we rush to put things out so they'll have something to do when they come. Why couldn't we keep the cupboards in the southeast corner organized so children could choose their own activities off the shelves, and put them back when they're done? And use only that corner of the room for the first hour. We can shut the other door and just have children come in that way, and think of some way to screen that area off from the rest of the room. Would it work, Paula?"

"Probably we should get the bookshelves out at the beginning," said Paula, "to make a cozy area. With maybe stuffed animals and pillows too--some of the kids just need to snuggle for awhile when they come. Would we have to set up tables for the other activities?"

"Wasn't Ruby suggesting we stop using so many tables, and just try little rugs or mats on the floor? If we put the rugs in the open cupboards too, and told children to get themselves a rug first and then a game, life would be less backbreaking! Do we have enough screens to wall off the area?"

"I think so. If not, I suppose we could use tables on their sides. Or we could make some hiding places by putting blankets over tables! Probably we'd have to move the block shelves out too, but turn them the other way and just use them for a wall till Jan gets here."

"Then we'd be opening up areas one by one, as we get here, wouldn't we?" asked Jan. "The light begins to dawn! When Mayella and I come, I can supervise blocks. Mayella, would you want to set up the housekeeping area?"

"Yeah, that's fine. And I been thinking while you all been talking. Why can't we have

the house things on open shelves too, and let the kids get 'em out instead of me doing it all?"

"We've been talking about using those shelves for table toys and puzzles and things, though," broke in Dolores.

"Why don't we move the house stuff right behind the block shelves, then," suggested Mayella. "If we're only going to have one house area instead of two, we can combine all the stuff and have a great big one. And I'll be the grandma in my rocking chair--ain't that nice?"

"Lovely!" approved Dolores. "And Paula can take some kids over to the kitchen, and when Ruby comes maybe she'll want to set up the art area. Sally?"

"By the time I get here you'll all be so busy, I think I'll just stay outdoors," beamed Sally. "Maybe I'll even invite some kids to come outside with me, just to get them out of your hair. Hey, I like the way this is working out!"

So did Ruby, when they told her about it. She decided that in setting up the art area she'd put the easels right across the middle of the room, as a barrier to divert and slow down traffic.

They tried it and liked the way it worked. When the stage climbing area was developed, screens were used to separate it from the block area. The piano, over in the corner where Sally's crew had pushed it, proved an excellent location for small-group music times, both spontaneous and planned. The effect of all this rearranging was to cut down on children's intrusion into each other's activities and to provide more opportunities for protected individual and small-group play, with attention from an adult. All pluses in the long day.

Boundaries With the World Outside

On the other hand, the boundaries between the center and the world outside were increasingly broken down, making life more interesting for children and adults alike. The shopping trips for rugs and pillows started it. Then, after awhile, Paula thought of extending the children's cooking experiences by taking them grocery shopping. When the limitations of the outdoor space got even Sally down, and she burst out one day, "Can't we take them to the park?" everyone was more than ready to figure out how. Trips to local parks and playgrounds soon became a regular part of the program.

Dolores's inspiration to set up her sewing machine out on the porch with an extension cord one glorious spring day was the start of one of the nicest ways of breaking down boundaries. A little old lady looked over the senior citizens' fence and asked in friendly tones, "What are you doing?" Dolores explained. "Do you really have time to do that while watching the children?" "Not really," responded Dolores, "but some of the children are involved watching me--they learn a lot by watching adults work. And we do need more pillows and things." "Could I help, perhaps?" asked the little old lady shyly. "I like to sew, and my grandchildren live a thousand miles away. I miss them."

The result of this conversation was not only some new and interesting adults in the center (the lady's friends soon wanted to come too), but also an outpouring of pillow covers, homemade stuffed animals, hand puppets, and a new idea--cloth hangings to be suspended from the ceiling and used as space dividers, sound absorbers, and bright spots in the room. Children crayoned designs on muslin; the senior citizens donated some brightly patterned drapery materials and did the hemming. The hangings were suspended by ropes from the ceiling and raised at night by pulleys, a task much vied-for by the children. Enlisted in this project, the custodian got interested in spite of himself, and he increasingly became still another familiar, helpful adult figure to the children.

Summary

As with all the dimensions at which we've been looking, intrusion and seclusion have both desirable and undesirable aspects. Intrusion is one way of getting novelty, stimulation, enrichment. New people and things coming through the boundaries are a source of new learning. The involvement of new people of different ages and both sexes was a decided plus for Ruby's center--providing new relationships and resources for children,

and a cooperative spirit among the varied community members sharing this community building.

On the other hand, seclusion--protection from intrusion--is a vital necessity in any living-and-learning environment, particularly one in which a large group of people, children and adults, spend a long day. Changes in the organization of indoor space created more privacy for everybody, and more opportunity to choose when to be with people and when to be alone, or with just one friend. Children who are able to make such choices, regulating the rhythm of their social relationships, are likely to be easier to live with than those who cannot. And ease of living together is a major criterion for good day care.

CHAPTER 7

DIMENSION: HIGH MOBILITY/LOW MOBILITY

In making research observations, we have used the term, *mobility*, to characterize the structure of children's activities in terms of the level of muscular involvement. High mobility implies large-muscle activities; it usually, but not necessarily, indicates active movement from place to place. (A game of catch, even if the thrower's aim is good and the receiver doesn't have to chase the ball, would be classified as high mobility.) Low mobility implies small-muscle, sedentary activities. In general, it is easier to provide for high mobility activities outdoors than indoors.

In preschool programs, simultaneous use of indoors and outdoors is much more common than in elementary schools. Some preschool teachers, however, view outdoor time as little more than recess--a free play time which teachers merely supervise, without involving themselves actively with children or providing special activities.

The extreme limitations on the outdoor space at Ruby's center make it difficult to provide adequately for large-muscle activities. As a result, children's running indoors has been a major staff concern. Running is a necessary and legitimate activity for young children. These children spend up to eleven hours a day in the center, yet it provides no legitimate opportunities for running except for short periods in the small outdoor space, and there too it is often restricted because spontaneous runners tend to bump into tricycle riders and organized game players.

Nor has there been opportunity for other use of large muscles, as in climbing. Some of the illicit runners manage to incorporate the steep stage stairs into their pathways, and children can climb a little--a very little--on the hollow block structures they sometimes build outdoors. But that's all. Children's needs for vigorous physical activity have simply not been met, except as they have taken the bit in their teeth and ignored the teachers' rules.

With the idea of using the edge of the stage as a climbing area, large-muscle opportunities have been greatly increased. The yard remained a problem area, however; it simply didn't offer enough to do. It was again Sally, who liked being outdoors, but was fed up with having nothing to do there, who precipitated an idea session.

"Look, Ruby had us all brainstorming problems once upon a time," she exclaimed. "I know all about the problems in the yard; can anyone brainstorm some solutions? What are all the possible things we could do out there? All ideas gratefully accepted, no matter how far-out."

Again a list evolved--an unexpectedly long list:

- Tricycles
- Balls
- Bean bags
- Hollow blocks
- Water play
- Water painting
- Tires
- Hose lengths and fire hats
- Blankets
- Tent
- Inflatable pool
- Sandbox
- Organized games
- House play
- Art activities
- Big cardboard boxes
- Painting boxes
- Boards for ramps
- Ropes and cowboy hats
- Card tables with "house" covers
- Cloth tunnel
- Car wash

"Some of those are indoor activities," protested Mayella. "Why would you want to take them outside?"

"Why not?" asked Sally. "In nice weather it would be fun to have art and housekeeping outside for a change. You might even like it, if you had your rocking chair out there."

A couple of months earlier, Mayella would have snapped back at any hint of teasing. Now she just grinned. "You tote it for me, I'll sit on the porch in the sunshine and take a spell of watching the kids outside. O.K.?"

"O.K. And let's get back to that list, 'cause I want to do something about it now. We have trikes and balls and bean bags and hollow blocks. We organize games--and I'm so sick of Ring-Around-The-Rosy I could die. Which of the other things could we do tomorrow?"

More sorting of lists:

Tomorrow	Future
House play	Sandbox (will have to be a sand table on wheels)
Water play	Tires
Big cardboard boxes	Boards--ramps
Art activities	Hose lengths and fire hats
Water painting	Ropes and cowboy hats
Painting boxes	Card tables with house covers
Blankets	Tent
	Cloth tunnel
	Inflatable pool
	Car wash

"Hey, tomorrow's going to be exciting!" rejoiced Sally. "Maybe we could even save some of those things for the day after tomorrow--next week, even. But I think I will stop by the grocery store and get some boxes and put them out as an obstacle course for the trike riders. And what about taking out the doll corner sinks and dishes and providing real water and bubbles, in this gorgeous weather?"

Tomorrow did turn out to be exciting, even chaotic, since the unusual opportunity of water and bubbles drew a crowd of children outdoors, and there was some pushing and squabbling. "We'd better not do *that* again," sighed Mayella at the end of the morning, worn out with all the commotion.

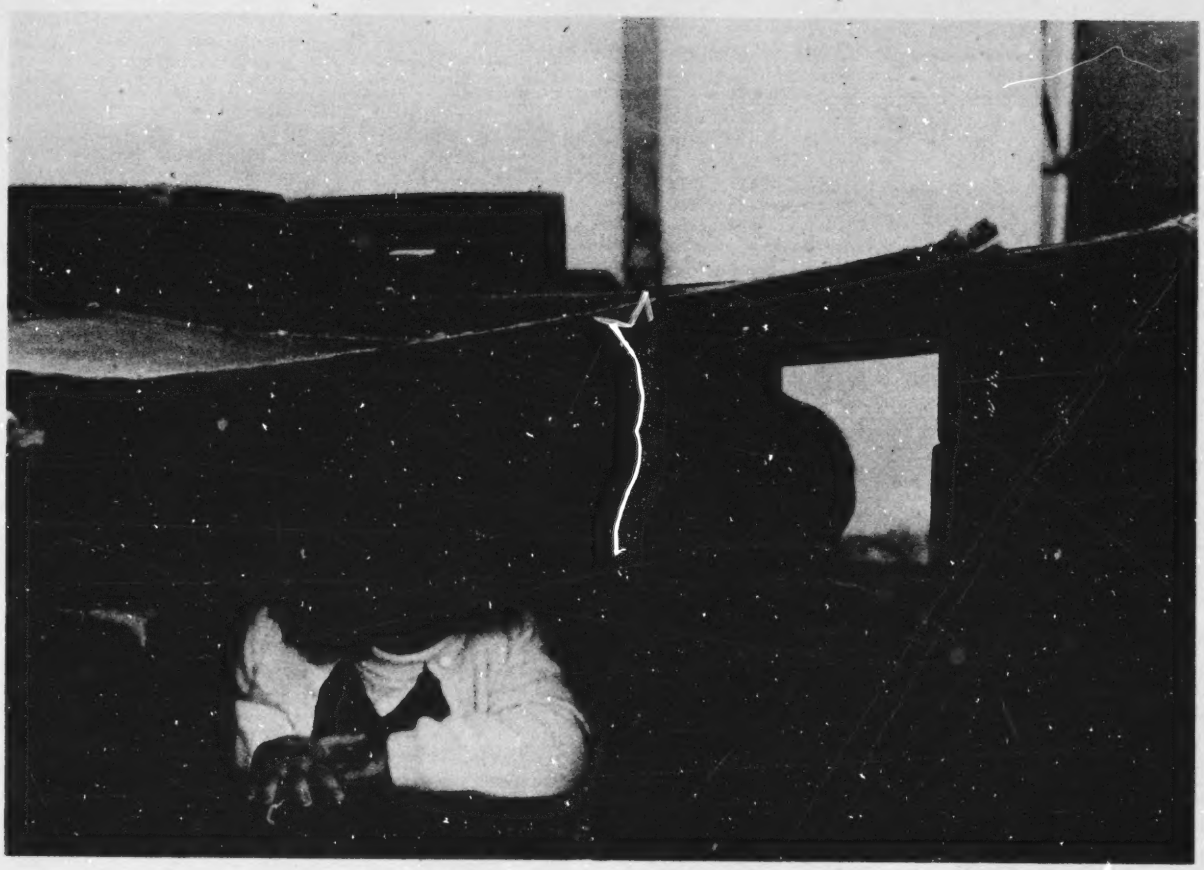
"No, what all the ruckus says to me is that we should do it every day for awhile," argued Ruby. "It's too easy to fall into the trap of denying children things if they misuse them the first time they're available. What I'd rather do is keep right on making them available, setting whatever limits we need (like only four children at a time). As soon as the novelty wears off, washing doll dishes will become just another interesting choice among many, not what all the children want to do all at once before it gets away."

"Would it help to have a couple of different water activities at the same time?" ventured Dolores. "Like cans of water and paint brushes for water painting--we could encourage kids to paint the fence, or the walls of the building. And how about some dishpans for bathing dolls in?"

"Yes, that's a great idea," agreed Ruby.

The next day did go much more smoothly. Indoors, finger painting with liquid starch and powder paint, another unusual and sloshy activity, helped divert some of the children who might otherwise have converged all at once on the outdoor activities. Several teachers commented on how relaxed the children were at nap time. Water play and finger paint really do release tension for many children.

As the days went on, a good many of the other ideas for outdoor activities became part of the program. Short lengths of old hose and plastic firemen's hats stimulated make-believe water play, both outdoors and in the climbing area indoors, on days too cool for real water. It became evident to all the staff what a difference dramatic ideas introduced into play made in extending children's interest. Ladders and slides and tables against the stage provided a complex unit for large-muscle activities. With the hoses and hats added, a super-unit was created, and more children were drawn into dramas lasting for long periods of time. Firepersons of both sexes put out imaginary fires in the housekeeping corner to the happily anguished screams of its inhabitants, and block builders' burning towers were thoughtfully extinguished too. Running in the room was thus legitimized and defined within meaningful limits.



A member of the senior citizens' group was delighted to build a sand table to Ruby's specifications in his shop at home. It was filled with sand after several trips in Sally's car to the river bottom on the edge of town, involving endless sand pails hauled by some tired, but proud, children. On wheels, it could be used either indoors or on the porch outside. Paula discovered that putting a sheet of heavy plastic under it indoors, which could be shaken out after use, considerably simplified the clean-up process.

At the beginning of summer, an inflatable pool was purchased at a discount store and carried by one adult and four children down to the gas station at the corner to get blown up. This trip had to be repeated each time the pool was used, since it was too big to store inflated, but this necessity gave everyone a turn at going to the gas station, which became one of the favorite local walks. Other walks in the neighborhood (watching cars, looking in store windows, shopping) took place regularly too, as did bus rides (not necessarily to get somewhere) and driving trips to parks and playgrounds, the zoo, the dairy, the lake, and the river bottom.

Frequent trips were made possible by keeping the groups small. An adult on a walking trip or a bus ride rarely took more than three or four children, enabling her both to manage them and to give them individual attention. Including children of varied ages also helped in management; four young three's are much more demanding than one three, two four's and a just-five. The five other adults remaining at the center could easily handle the program for the remaining forty or so children, especially since it had become more flexible and self-regulating.

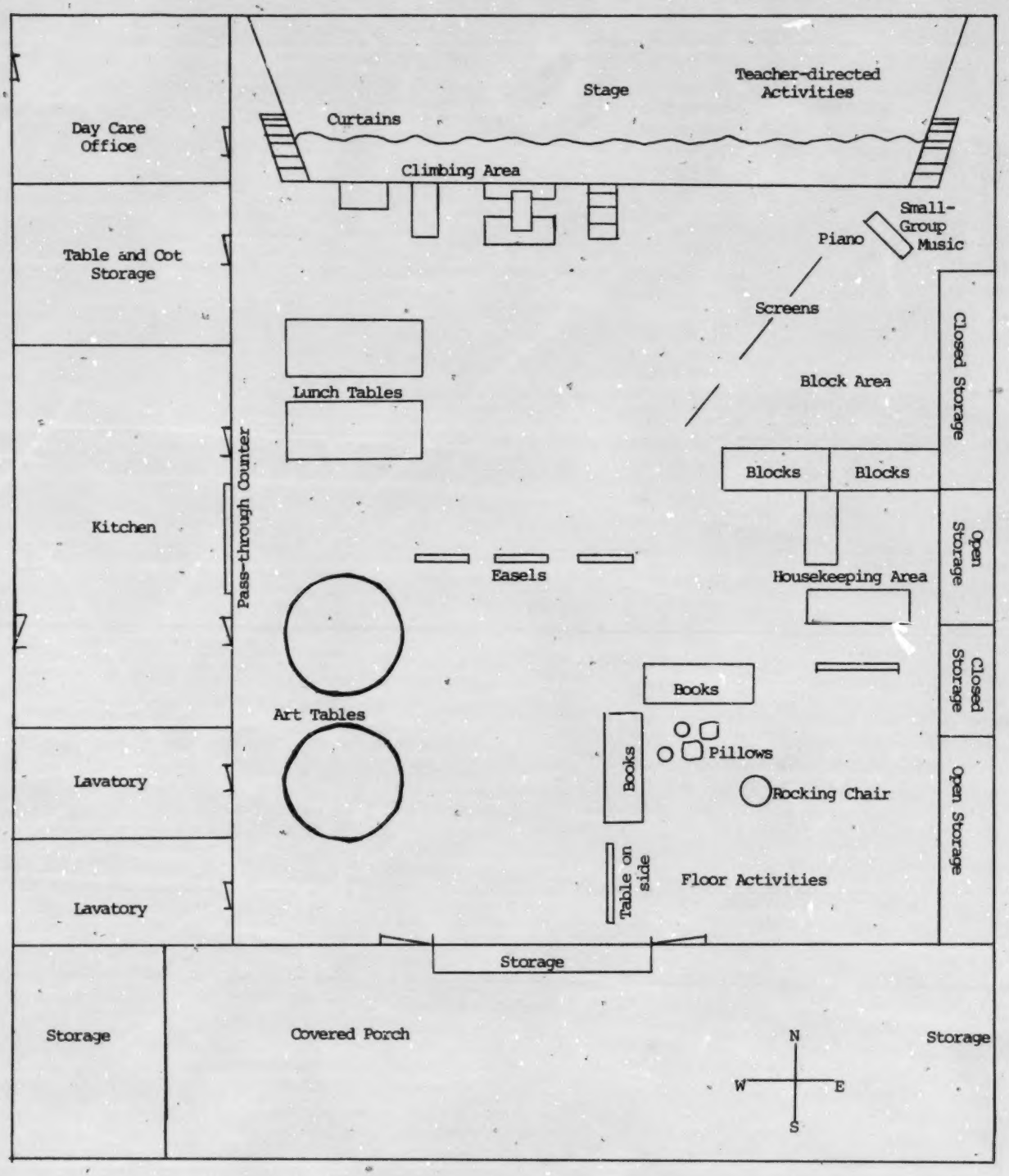
A hot-weather highlight was the car wash. The idea came from Jan's recognition that the play yard was, in fact, a parking lot. Why not take advantage of it instead of deploring it? So one summer morning Jan drove her car right into the play yard before the fence was up, shut the windows and locked it, got her garden hose and a supply of pails, sponges, rags, and soft brushes out of the trunk. Never was a car so thoroughly and endlessly washed!

Problem-Solving: A Perennial Process

Of course it didn't all work out as planned. If you've ever taught in day care, you may already have spotted some of the problems likely to accompany the program changes made by the staff of Ruby's center. Occur they did, and the list of complaints, while it was shorter and the items on it changed, was never eliminated. No program ever reaches perfection, and how dull it would be if it did!

But the things that were accomplished were important. The looser, more open structure with more varied things to do gave children chances to play alone or in small spontaneous groupings, free from the constraints of participation in an organized group. Teachers, simultaneously freed from the pressures of trying to run an organized group, were able for extended periods to stand back and keep an eye on self-regulating play, to move in to give warm, unpressured attention to individuals, or even to take a few minutes for themselves. The greater sensory responsiveness of the environment decreased everyone's tension: food smells, pillows and mats and rugs to sink into, Mayella, soft and responsive in a rocking chair instead of an upright, taut obstacle, sand and water to investigate, and as time went on, the greenness of growing plants in pots and the furriness of animal visitors-for-a-day. All these contributed to a more comfortable, homelike environment pleasing to the senses. Frequent trips away from the center increased its appeal as a nice place to come home to, rather than a permanent trap.

Day Care Indoor Space
(After)



CHAPTER 8

THRIVERS AND NON-THRIVERS: CHILDREN

Every teacher knows who her non-thrivers are. In selecting a sample of children to observe in day care centers, we asked the staff of each center to identify several children who were thriving in the program and several more who were not yet thriving as hoped. Teachers had little difficulty with this task, though we offered no further definition.

Teachers' criteria for thriving generally include morale (happiness), active involvement in classroom activities, success in meeting task expectations, and consideration for others. Teachers in the day care centers in which we observed, asked to do a card sort of children's characteristics, provided a clear statement of the characteristics of children whom they saw as thriving in day care. These children:

Obey easily
Are cooperative
Stay at activities until they are completed
Play well with other children
Like quiet activities
Are usually cheerful, happy
Adapt easily to new situations
Draw other people to themselves.

Children who are nominated as thrivers make a definite impression on adults. These are children that adults can appreciate. They make adults feel competent, confident, and on top of things. Thrivers do not create problems in a setting; they solve them.

As we observed them, thrivers have certain characteristics which are very important to group life: 1) They get along well with other children. They can keep the social interaction going. They add play ideas. They shape the play so it is rewarding for everyone. They can also attend to their own concerns and withdraw from other children when it serves their purposes. 2) They enjoy the activities which the teacher offers. When the teacher puts out play dough, it is the thriver who walks in, looks at the table which is set up and says, "Oh boy! We've got play dough." 3) Thrivers can negotiate and make demands on adults and children. An outstanding characteristic of all of our thrivers was their confidence in dealing with adults and other children. Steve could get the teacher to play ball with him in a setting where teachers were singularly uninvolved with children. Lynn could get the teacher to give her vast amounts of attention in a setting with twelve two-year-olds and one adult. Debra could do what she wanted and simultaneously be viewed by teachers as being useful and helpful. These children clearly had found a good fit between their characteristics, adults' capacity to function, and the limits of the setting.

It may be significant that all of these children were rather small for their age. They all had excellent small-muscle coordination. They had stamina and energy, but no great need to express it in large-muscle activity. All of these characteristics made their style particularly appropriate to the sorts of activities and opportunities which are possible in a day care setting.

In contrast, the children nominated by teachers as non-thrivers:

Get into trouble with other children
Often act without thinking
Are often emotional
Do not stay interested in one activity for long
Are often grumpy
Like vigorous, active play
Often appear clumsy
Find it difficult to shift from one activity to another.

Like thrivers, non-thrivers make a definite impression on adults. These were the children whose behavior brought uncertainty, conflict, and confusion into the group. Adults found them hard to live with and hard to appreciate. They often made teachers feel inadequate. Objectively, they had the following distinguishing characteristics: 1) They received negative responses from adults and children. 2) They did not get along well with other children, either because they shied away from social interaction, or because they continually entered into it only to produce negative outcomes. 3) They could not negotiate effectively with adults or children and get acceptance for their wishes and desires. 4) They often differed from other children in energy level, size, coordination, and ability to make use of small-muscle activity; they were higher-energy, larger, and/or poorly coordinated.

Among the several types of non-thrivers were those who did not approach other children. These children tended to play by themselves, to reject or escape from adult approach, and to engage in solitary activities which did not seem to be particularly pleasurable to them.

Another type of non-thriver was the child whose style or energy level seemed to be too much for the setting to cope with. Often he or she had great needs for boisterous, large-muscle activity. We could imagine them on farms, or in spacious neighborhoods where there was plenty to do, lots of errands to run, and few of the very narrow constraints inevitable within a group of children sitting at a table. These children were frequently interested in other children and appeared to possess most of the skills required for developing rewarding social interaction. Much of their trouble with other children stemmed from two sources. First, they sometimes had so much energy that it frightened the more timid children. Second, they received so much negative adult input that to play with them almost invariably meant close contact with a scolding or a series of restrictions. Consequently, many other children appeared to have learned that playing with a non-thriver was a rather hazardous involvement.

The child who is unhappy, listless, boisterous, inept at his work, and/or uncooperative is a threat to the teacher's own success at her teaching task, or a challenge to her understanding and skill. What she does about him will depend both on her judgment of what is wrong, and her resources for changing the environment to meet his needs.

We know a good deal about non-thrivers in Ruby's center because we had the opportunity to observe their behavior in detail as part of our study of day care centers. Joanie and Jason, both non-thrivers, presented a distinct contrast.

Joanie was going-on-four, tall for her age, muscular, and well-built. Physically, she was very active, and because the space offered few legitimate physical challenges, Joanie was often out-of-bounds. She did a great deal of calling attention to herself; her "Hey, everybody, look at me!" was frequently heard from the stage or the top of the shelves. She was very much involved with adults. Her behavior included an exceptionally high amount of testing limits, usually involving an interpersonal hassle with teachers. She spent much time coping with anger and often appeared distressed.

However, she managed to get her share of pleasurable involvement, primarily through rewarding physical activities. She could do more things with a tricycle than any other child we had ever observed, like riding full-speed across the yard with one hand on the handlebars and one foot on the pedals. She built the hollow blocks as high as she could reach, scrambled to the top, and then leaped off as they toppled, to her own glee and everyone else's dismay.

The other three-year-olds seemed somewhat afraid of Joanie. During dramatic play, several children were getting clothes out of a box. Joanie came and sat on it. The children howled and screamed, and Joanie was immediately scolded and ordered off. She seemed to delight in the ruckus she caused; this sort of "creating a scene" described her behavior many times during the day.

Certainly she was an exhausting child for a teacher to cope with. Teachers tended to alternate between gentle suggestions of alternatives and, when driven to distraction, firm and often angry statements of what Joanie could not do. Joanie seemed a little puzzled by the gentle suggestion of alternatives, but she clearly considered the firm setting of limits as an interesting challenge.

It seemed to the observers that much of Joanie's impossible behavior was a frantic demand for more complexity. She needed a number of hard things to do--physical things, social tasks, cognitive challenges. She also needed opportunities to develop some real mutuality in her relationships with other children. Clearly, she viewed the small child-

ren in her age group with a certain amount of contempt. We thought she might have worked harder to build relationships had she been with children who were closer to her size and could do some things better than she could.

The changes which gradually took place in Ruby's center bore out these hunches by making a notable difference in Joanie's behavior. The replacement of age-groupings with a free-choice, wide-age structure freed Joanie and the other threes from continuous contact with one another. The new indoor climbing area provided her with new physical challenges, in company with some older children who were more competent than she. The regular snack preparation activity gave her a chance to dominate other children, when it was her turn to serve snacks, and to live up to clear adult expectations for the performance of interesting, significant work. Finally, Jan's cognitive-skills group proved an irresistible challenge. Since it was designed for older fours, Joanie wasn't invited. But she pestered until she was, misbehaved the first time she came and was promptly ousted, promised to be good next time, and was. Some of the tasks were beyond her, but she was enchanted by the chance to try, and to be with the big kids. She didn't become an easy child, but she and other children and teachers were increasingly able to enjoy each other.

Jason, in contrast, was a very little boy, not-quite-three when he was first enrolled in the center, but more like a young two-year-old in looks and behavior. He spent much of his time in looking and watching and just getting through the daily routines. He interacted very little with other children. When he did try to make contact with them, he used a poke-baby style accompanied by a sound (no words). This approach netted him a great deal of justifiable rejection. He was so inept at his social relations that it was necessary for teachers to provide a certain amount of isolation, since he simply could not maintain himself in close quarters with a group of children seated at a table for lunch or art activities. Teachers often coped by seating him at a small table by himself, a type of seclusion which protected him and other children, but also labeled him as deviant.

Most day care programs are based on certain assumptions: that children can use language effectively, that they have some minimal skills in contacting other children, that they can profit from a group experience. Jason is an example of what happens to children who do not fit these assumptions. He appeared to need much more individual attention and the close companionship of an adult who could keep demonstrating to him, slowly and consistently, the uses of language.

The changes which took place in the center's program helped Jason only a little. The staggered lunch time, which made toileting, washing, and related routines more flexible, enabled Jason to move somewhat more at his own pace, with less adult pressure. Changed groupings increased the potential for one-to-one adult/child interactions. Since Jason was not, however, either cuddly or notably responsive to adult attention, other children got most of what became available. Rather than group day care, a family day care home with only a few children would probably have given Jason more adult attention, and the leeway to absorb new experiences on a smaller scale and at his own pace.

Non-Thrivers and Accountability

In observing both in day care centers and elementary schools, we have been struck by the usefulness of non-thrivers in clarifying the demands and shortcomings of a program. In every program, even those rated low in quality by observers, there are at least a few children who appear to be thriving. Likewise, the "best" program, by whatever standards one wishes to apply, will usually have its own small share of non-thrivers. It has occurred to us that concentrated staff attention to creating a more workable environment for its non-thrivers would, in most instances, tend to increase quality for every child in the program. For example, a classroom's demand for limited mobility may be noticeable primarily through the behavior of the non-thriver who simply cannot handle it, but this demand is also a source of discomfort and restriction of experience for many other children in the setting.

In California, teachers have been required by the state legislature to be accountable for meeting the educational goals they set for their classes. Neither the goals nor the means of measuring their achievement are set by the state; rather, they are to be defined by the individual teacher, school, or district. Predictably, response to this demand has taken a wide variety of forms. A promising approach is that of a small school district in which each teacher was asked to choose four non-thrivers in her class and to be accountable for their learning for a specified period of time. According to the

district consultant, many productive changes have occurred in classrooms since teachers have been faced with this challenge. Apparently, a teacher given active permission to decide what to do about her most pressing problems will, in fact, exercise initiative and imagination in doing something--will even take the risk of doing something new and not prescribed by the curriculum.

In our opinion, measures of quality in educational programs should be based on the concept of goodness of fit for individual children. Where there is a good fit, the adults in the program and the activities which they provide *enable a child to experience himself as competent and likeable and provide him with opportunities for enthusiastic and sustained involvement*. Whatever its structure, a quality program is one which pays attention to its non-thrivers and provides enough flexibility to help them move toward a thriving experience.

CHAPTER 9

THRIVERS AND NON-THRIVERS: TEACHERS

A productive teaching/learning environment is one in which the teacher, as well as the children, can thrive. Thriving includes personal growth, continued learning, and joy in the process. These are criteria inadequately recognized in the evaluation of schools and day care centers.

Sarason has described his experience:

> *Nobody would disagree with the statement that schools are primarily for the education of children...What children should be taught, what experiences children should have, how much progress children should make--these questions reveal who is center stage. I have spent thousands of hours in schools and one of the first things I sensed was that the longer the person had been a teacher, the less excited, or alive, or stimulated he seemed to be about his role. It was not that they were uninterested, or felt that what they were doing was unimportant, or that they were not being helpful to their students, but simply that being a teacher was on the boring side. Generally speaking, these teachers were not as helpful to children as they might have been or as frequently as the teachers themselves would have liked to have been. It took me a long time to realize that what would be inexplicable would be if things turned out otherwise, because schools are not created to foster the intellectual and professional growth of teachers. The assumption that teachers can create and maintain those conditions which make school learning and school living stimulating for children, without those same conditions existing for teachers, has no warrant in the history of man.* (Sarason, 1972, pp. 123-124)

Sarason proposes, in contrast, that if schools were to create the conditions for teachers which enable them to investigate, learn, and change on a continuing basis, teachers would be more likely to create the same conditions for children. He cites his own criteria for evaluating the psychoeducational clinic which he and others created:

> *...help to others is* (not) *the primary basis upon which we wish to be judged. The fact is that our primary value concerns our need to help ourselves change and learn, for us to feel that we are growing in our understanding of where we have been, where we are, and what we are about, and that we are enjoying what we are doing. We are not here because we have solutions, and we do not believe that there is a solution. By accepting this value we are not likely to blame failure on others (we know the score but they don't even know the game) but instead we would view it as a stimulus to change.* (Sarason, 1972, p. 122)

A teacher who is not learning at least as much as his students is bound to get stale. It is not enough to do things because they're "good for the children." Things done should include elements of personal challenge for the teacher, and moments of joy.

Working as a project facilitator in a primary school, Stine made this point clearly:

> *Teaching and learning are viewed as very serious! School is a place for children and adults to work, not play. At one point I attempted to analyze what was happening to me personally because I was experiencing a lack of joy. I didn't want that to happen. Why was school becoming such a serious place for me and the project?*
>
> *--Because it must matter a great deal*
> *--Because things aren't right and you are afraid*
> *--Because someone might do something about it and that is scary, too; it means change*
> *--Because you have no power and can do absolutely nothing*
> *--Because everyone else is serious.*

To play with children meant that I might risk my authority, and yet not to play meant for me a loss of my own vitality. (Stine, 1973, p. 51)

How can you be the person you really are? How can you teach the way you want to? At the beginning--and, for many of us, at points along the way as well--it's necessary to come to grips with the basic question, How *do* I want to teach? Thus, Linda, faced with problems of control in her class of fourth and fifth graders, sought help from a veteran teacher in the school and got from her a long list ("I wrote it down") of "mean things to do to children." Linda tried the mean things, and they worked, but after four days, "I couldn't stand it, it wasn't me. So I loosened up--and now I don't have control. Some days are very good; others are very bad."

Linda truly enjoyed children and was good at teaching them things; she liked doing things *with* them. She knew she wanted a pleasant, friendly, relaxed classroom. She hadn't figured out how to achieve it consistently, but she was trying.

Ruby's approach to civilizing a day care center included giving teachers permission to be themselves, to choose what they liked to do with children, and to restructure time and space and groupings to make those behaviors possible. Sally liked playing with children, especially outdoors; Paula liked cooking; Jan liked being "teacher"; Mayella preferred sitting quietly. Mayella, the clearest non-thriver on the staff when Ruby came, had clearly never thought of giving herself permission to be herself while teaching. She had a stereotyped picture of what teachers do and was trying hard, though ineffectively and grumpily, to live up to it. The outcomes of greater flexibility were easier staff communication, more pleasure shared among both adults and children, and an enriched curriculum for children as adults started thinking of things *they* would like to do to introduce novelty into their daily experiences.

With support, teaching staff can risk making real decisions. Some of these decisions will have to do with space and materials; others will have to do with their own behavior.

Teacher Simplifies/Teacher Complicates

To what extent does the teacher act to extend and elaborate the child's play ideas? To the young children enrolled in a day care center, the teacher's mere presence at an activity serves as a magnet. In setting up interest centers in a free choice environment, you plan in terms of the distribution of space, materials, *and* staff members. While the distribution of staff members often reflects primarily the need for adult supervision of particular activities, such as carpentry, fingerpainting, or cooking, it should also be considered in terms of stimulating interest in any activity.

The block area, for example, has been ignored by the children for several weeks, while other areas have been overcrowded. What strategies can the staff use to stimulate renewed interest in blocks? One strategy might be to add to the complexity of the environment through the introduction of new materials--small animals or cars, for example--which were not there before. Another might be simply to reorganize the existing materials so they look different; a teacher of our acquaintance was inspired one day to rearrange the blocks on the shelves so their ends rather than their sides were facing outwards, and the block-builders in the group suddenly perceived a new challenge. A third strategy, and in some ways the easiest in a team-teaching setting, is to station one adult in the block area, making it newly interesting, both through her presence and her active involvement.

Child: *What are you doing?*
Teacher: *I'm building a road.*
Child: *Can I help?*

Other helpers are very likely to follow.

Child-initiated dramatic play of moderate complexity can, as appropriate, be expanded into a "super-unit" by the entry of an adult in a related, but complicating, role. The playhouse has been the scene of endless dishwashing for several days, but the potential uses of the stove and refrigerator have been ignored. This morning, the dishwashers are beginning to squabble. The teacher knocks at the door. "I'm the milkman. How much milk do you need this morning?"

On a good day, the milkman would be welcomed, discussion of how much milk is needed for drinking, making pudding, and so on would follow, and perhaps some cottage cheese and

eggs would be ordered too. This isn't a good day. The ringleader pauses in her arguing only to state firmly, "Go away. We buy our milk at the store." Teachers need to be sensitive to when their complicating will be welcome, and willing to accept rejection without a fuss. This teacher, in fact, quickly decided that simplifying rather than complicating was called for, as the squabblers came to blows and she firmly directed each to a private, quieter activity.

Some teachers in pre-kindergarten programs regularly enter into children's play, enriching it and adding to the interest of their own day through their genuine enjoyment. Awareness of appropriate and inappropriate behavior is important, however. A young and energetic teacher entering into four-year-olds' rough-housing on the grass may overstimulate them unless he is very sensitive to their tolerance levels and is skilled in redirecting too-"high" behavior. A teacher who joins in children's play with clay may intimidate rather than stimulate their creativity if she regularly makes products they cannot duplicate, and they decide that they want to. But on the whole, participating with children in interesting activities is probably more enjoyable both for them and for the adult than is rigid adherence to the adult/supervisor role.

Teacher Intrudes/Teacher Withdraws

To what extent is the teacher intrusive in children's activities? We are using "intrusive" as a neutral, rather than a negative, idea here: How much does the teacher talk? How much direction, suggestion, help does he give to children? How independent does he expect children to be?

Sally's call for piano movers was a good example of teacher intrusion for the purpose both of redirecting out-of-bounds behavior and stimulating dramatic play/real work with children through sharing her own spontaneous ideas with them. As the teacher in charge of large-group music time, she had her own concerns about how it was working and how it might be changed. As a participant in the staff discussion of "What can we do about the space?" she had had her thinking stimulated, and ideas were simmering. At the moment the runners went by the piano, it all came together in her head, and she intruded on them to involve them in mutual problem-solving and a new game, all in one.

The amount of teacher intrusion characteristic in a program reflects program goals and philosophy as well as teacher style. Faced with the expectation that she teach six-year-olds to read, in a prescribed curriculum approach, a first-grade teacher must be intrusive; she has to keep explaining things to the children and correcting them. Faced with the responsibility of making the long day care day satisfying for both adults and children, Ruby is trying to enable her staff to become less intrusive, by structuring the physical environment to permit more self-help and mutual help by children. Each is realistically judging the demands of the program and structuring teacher behavior appropriately.

For teaching to be satisfying, however, the frequency and intensity of teacher interaction with children should reflect not only program goals, but also the teacher's own personal tempo and energy level. Some adults working with children need to maintain a steady, reasonably relaxed pace of interaction. Others, particularly if they teach for only three or four hours a day, are happy in an intense, fast-moving interaction pattern; they have a lot of energy and they like sharing it with children. Still others seem to function best in a rhythm of intrusion and seclusion--high-involvement periods interspersed with times-to-oneself. For example, we observed in one day care center:

> *When I arrived, Mrs. Paulson was scrambling eggs with ten children, being neutral rather than really friendly, because this is a difficult activity to run, but basically unruffled and helpful. She set more limits than some of the children were happy with (you got a turn either to break an egg or to beat the eggs, but not both), but this was probably inevitable with this adult/child ratio. Cooking the eggs was followed by eating them, and here there was enough of everything for everybody--eggs, juice, and dry cereal for children who still wanted more.*
>
> *In the time between snack and outdoors, the children were free to play in the room. Mrs. P. told them they had fifteen minutes before going outside. The open space in the middle of the room promoted a certain amount of running and tossing a frisbee, but Mrs. Paulson wasn't bothered by it, and most of the children did settle down to a self-selected activity: dress-up, puzzles, etc. The teacher, having worked hard at the eggs, simply went about her own business at*

this time. She reminded a few children to go to the bathroom, but mostly I'm not sure what she was doing (picking up spilled egg, partly) other than not bothering children.

I imagine that this whole program works to provide adequate stimulation/relaxation for teachers. They have periods of intensive involvement, but they're competent enough to enjoy them, and then they have times both indoors and out when they don't have to keep their thumb on children every minute; consequently, they can be nice to them if asked. Both indoors and outdoors, children seem generally able to find things to do; the physical space and equipment really support good free play. (Prescott, et al., 1975, pp. 50-51)

Teacher is Mobile/Teacher is Not Mobile

In a team-teaching situation, individual differences between teachers may be fruitfully capitalized on to provide variety in the mobility level of relationships offered to children. In Ruby's center, Sally was young and energetic, Mayella considerably older and slow-moving. As long as Mayella was expected to share responsibility for controlling the high-mobility behavior of children, she remained both grumpy and ineffective. As long as Sally had to take a full share of indoor time, when outdoors was where she wanted to be, she experienced tension and boredom, and, inevitably, took some of these out on the children.

Greater specialization of responsibilities permitted Sally to be more active and Mayella less, with benefits for the morale of both. Mayella in a rocking chair was able to relax, offering a low-mobility focus for tired, unhappy, or just snuggly children. Such children have a hard time finding safe, quiet places in many group settings; here, Mayella's presence added to the safety and interest of the quiet corner, and enabled her to pay attention to whether individual children's needs were being met. At the same time, the head teacher's willingness to permit considerable autonomy on the part of her staff made possible such spontaneous events as Sally's piano-moving, in which she redirected running into a more productive, but still high-mobility, activity.

Some environments enable the liveliest staff members to really "do their thing" with the children, to their mutual delight. In one day care center, we saw a

...beautiful, beautiful romp in the adjacent meadow with the young man teacher. He promoted some races, but mostly the children--and he--just romped in the tall grass. He pointed out a butterfly to them, which they stalked, and on the way back called them all to come smell a flower on a bush.

The other teachers, at the same time, were being sedately adult:

Outdoors in the yard there was a long smooth free play time. The teachers were going about their business (one had a clipboard with some sort of chart) but were accessible to children who wanted or needed them. Jerry kept involving them in his selling-doughnuts game; they responded warmly and playfully, but also like adults with other things to do, and the whole interchange had a nice quality. Play was fluid; there were plenty of tricycles, plenty of sand. (Mrs. P. spent a good deal of her time with a broom sweeping off the walk. The unwalled sand areas are very attractive, but a nuisance, I suspect.) (Prescott, et al., 1975, p. 51)

Working with very young children in play environments, a good many teachers engage in at least occasional high-mobility behavior. In contrast, the instances of high-mobility behavior I've* observed in public school teachers are rare enough that I can recall them one by one. The first was my fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. O'Neill, who wore pink-striped pinafores and played jump rope with us. She didn't just help turn the rope; she *jumped*. We adored her.

The rest are much more recent. On one occasion I took a group of college students to visit a public alternative elementary/secondary school in which teacher/student rela-

*Betty Jones

tions are unusually informal. A lively basketball game was in progress as we walked through the yard, with players of assorted shapes and sizes. I looked at them and asked the group I was with, "Which one is the teacher?" It took them several minutes to pick him out. When not playing basketball, he taught high school science.

Two other teachers I've gotten to know regularly enter into the physical education activities of their upper-elementary classes. Joan plays baseball with her kids and teaches them folk dancing, which is one of her own out-of-school pleasures.

> *Joan demonstrates, obviously enjoying doing it, and saying, "Right, left, mish-mosh, mish-mosh." The kids trip out on the silliness of "mish-mosh" and quickly learn the dance. Joan says, "If you don't know the dance, don't worry, 'cause it was a made-up dance anyway. Just move with the group." Then they go outside to dance on the playground where they will have more room (and also provide a considerable source of entertainment for wandering teachers and students, and a source of jealousy as well).*

Mildred involved in relay races is a sight not to be missed; after she takes her turn, she's a whole cheering section in herself. Both these teachers, it seems worth mentioning, are a little out-of-place in their schools; their dress is casual (to free them for races and baseball), and their behavior is regarded by some of their more proper colleagues as not quite "professional." Yet certainly the relaxation, in recent years, of dress codes for women teachers, with pants an acceptable alternative to heels-and-hose, does make mobility by teachers more practical than it used to be.

Teacher is Soft/Teacher is Hard

You may recall that our original list of softness indicators, developed out of observations in day care centers serving children of ages two to five, included one aspect of teacher behavior--"laps." In some day care centers, teachers' laps are rarely or never available for even the littlest children to sit on. Asked why not, these teachers are likely to explain that if they held one child, all the rest would want to be held too, and teachers would be continually smothered. Yet in other centers, where laps are a standard part of the furniture, teachers seem to survive happily and undamaged. It is important to recognize that no healthy child wants to be held all the time, and that if the teacher with a dozen children is known by them to be available for hugging when needed, it is statistically unlikely that all twelve will be feeling dependent simultaneously. Furthermore, it is possible to take turns on laps and being little and loved, just as it is on tricycles and being big and powerful.

Whether laps are available obviously depends, to begin with, on whether adults are standing up or sitting down. In settings which define alert teacher supervision as requiring a standing position, a teacher's potential for softness is decreased. Even a determined small hugger can't do much better than clutch her around the knees or waist. While teachers with flexible backs or knees may manage considerable up-and-down mobility in order to relate to children at their level, teachers stiff in any of these joints are likely to find themselves maintaining a rigid posture, confronting children with a hard obstacle, even while offering the reassuring presence of someone big, visible, and vigilant.

In a center in which both softness and hardness are seen as having value, more teachers have a chance of experiencing themselves as competent. At Ruby's center, Jan had always seen herself, and been seen by others, as a good teacher; she was professionally educated, well-organized, quick-thinking, and imaginative. By choice, she worked with the older children, and her frustrations came mostly from disinterest or unreadiness of some children in the lively group lessons she taught. Yet Jan was a "hard" teacher; she enjoyed interacting with children's minds rather than with their bodies. She was notably unsuccessful in helping tense children relax at nap time. Full-day care was not, in fact, the setting in which she would have chosen to teach; it was just that no elementary school positions were available when she applied.

Mayella, in contrast, caused Ruby to despair when she first became head teacher; nor did Mayella think much of herself in her role as aide. She had gotten into day care as a step up from day work; it paid better and in some respects it was easier. But she felt at a disadvantage with the other staff and with the more aggressive children, especially since center rules forbade the spankings some of them clearly needed. Why on earth was she hired? was Ruby's initial question to herself. She doesn't even seem to like children. But to the committee which selected staff for the center in its first year, May-

ella's qualifications had been clear: she was a respected member of the community served by the center, and a faithful Sunday school teacher; she had successfully raised her own children, against odds, and was a devoted grandmother.

Mayella was a combination of warmth and no-nonsense in dealing with children in settings familiar to her, but in day care, so far, she had had little chance to show the warmth. As she saw it, you have to make children behave before you can be nice to them; and since in this open space with a large group of children and limits on the use of discipline, she had difficulty making children behave, she wasn't often nice to them. It was Ruby's sudden hunch that Mayella sitting down comfortably in a homelike setting might be a different person, that opened the possibility of her becoming a softer and more competent teacher. By giving her permission to relax on the job, Ruby offered Mayella a different model for teaching than the rigid one she held.

Summary

A productive teaching/learning environment is one in which both teachers and children thrive. An environment in which an individual can thrive is one which offers him the maximum number and variety of choices with which he can cope at a given time. As a child's coping capacity changes in the course of the day and over time, and as different children differ in their capacities, a teacher needs to vary the environment over time, and for different individuals. This she does by making decisions to simplify or to enrich the environment--physical and behavioral--along any of a number of dimensions (soft/hard, open/closed, simple/complex, intrusion/seclusion, high/low mobility). Such decisions are usually based on her perceptions of children's needs, but sometimes they are based on her own needs--she's had all the complexity she can stand for the morning, or she's getting bored and has to find something to enrich the environment for herself.

In group day care, where teachers must work as a team to provide care for children throughout the long day, the interrelated needs of the adults in the program require as much careful attention as those of the children. Adults need to grow together; they need opportunities to enjoy each other's company, as well as the children's. Only then can day care offer a possible human environment for all its members, little and big alike.

REFERENCES

The following publications by the authors serve as companion volumes to this one:

Elizabeth Jones, *Dimensions of Teaching--Learning Environments: A Handbook for Teachers.* Pasadena: Pacific Oaks College, 1973.

ED 120268

Elizabeth Prescott, with Elizabeth Jones, Sybil Kritchevsky, Cynthia Milich and Ede Haselhoef, *Assessment of Child-Rearing Environments: An Ecological Approach. Part I: Who Thrives in Group Day Care?* Pasadena: Pacific Oaks College, 1975.

Elizabeth Prescott, "Is Day Care as Good as a Good Home?" *Young Children*, 33:2 (January 1978), pp. 13-19.

Sybil Kritchevsky and Elizabeth Prescott, with Lee Walling, *Planning Environments for Young Children: Physical Space.* Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1969.

OTHER REFERENCES

Susan McCormick, *The Discovery Process of a Discovery Room Teacher.* Pasadena: Pacific Oaks College, 1975.

Seymour B. Sarason, *The Creation of Settings and the Future Societies.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1972.

Robert Sommer, *Tight Spaces.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974.

Sharon Stine, *Supporting Change in Public Schools.* Pasadena: Pacific Oaks College, 1973.